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The Unique Magazine

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DREAM stories have a strange fascination for many readers, and this magazine from time to time has printed some of the best dream stories in the language. Only too often, however, in the course of a week's reading of story manuscripts submitted to WEIRD TALES, we come across a dream story which is simply the narration of a dream that occurred to the author. A dream story may be a very remarkable and gripping tale indeed, if the events of the dream are linked up and interwoven with the concrete things of life itself; but the mere narration of a dream, as a dream, however strange it may be of itself, constitutes no story, and does not find its way into the columns of WEIRD TALES, where you, the readers, are accustomed to finding only stories that fire the imagination or hold the interest to the last sentence. The mere narration of a dream that somebody had, be that dream ever so vivid and startling, can not have the eery fascination of a tale such as Robert E. Howard's *The Dream Snake,* or Willis Knapp Jones' *The Other Vera,* both of which stories wove a tense drama around the interaction of the dream experiences with the events of waking life. *Clarimonde,* by Gustave Flaubert; *The Dream Peddler,* by Frank Owen; and *The Wonderful Thing,* by Henry S. Whitehead (to mention just a few of the dream stories that have appeared from time to time in WEIRD TALES), all derived their peculiar charm from the interplay of the dreams with life itself. It is this type of dream-tale that occasionally finds its way into the pages of this magazine, and we hope to print many more such tales in future issues. In the meantime we shall continue to give you the truly weird stories on which the brilliant success of this magazine is founded, together with the cream of all the weird-scientific stories written today.

R. W. Jimerson, of San Francisco, writes: "Your March issue hits a new high level, I believe. My own preference is for stories that leave something to the imagination, and the March number hits the ball. Its literary quality is about the best you have attained; from cover to cover the boys have done their stuff beautifully. Murray Leinster, in his serial, *The Strange People,* has created suspense without tipping his hand, and built up an unusually

(Continued on page 711)

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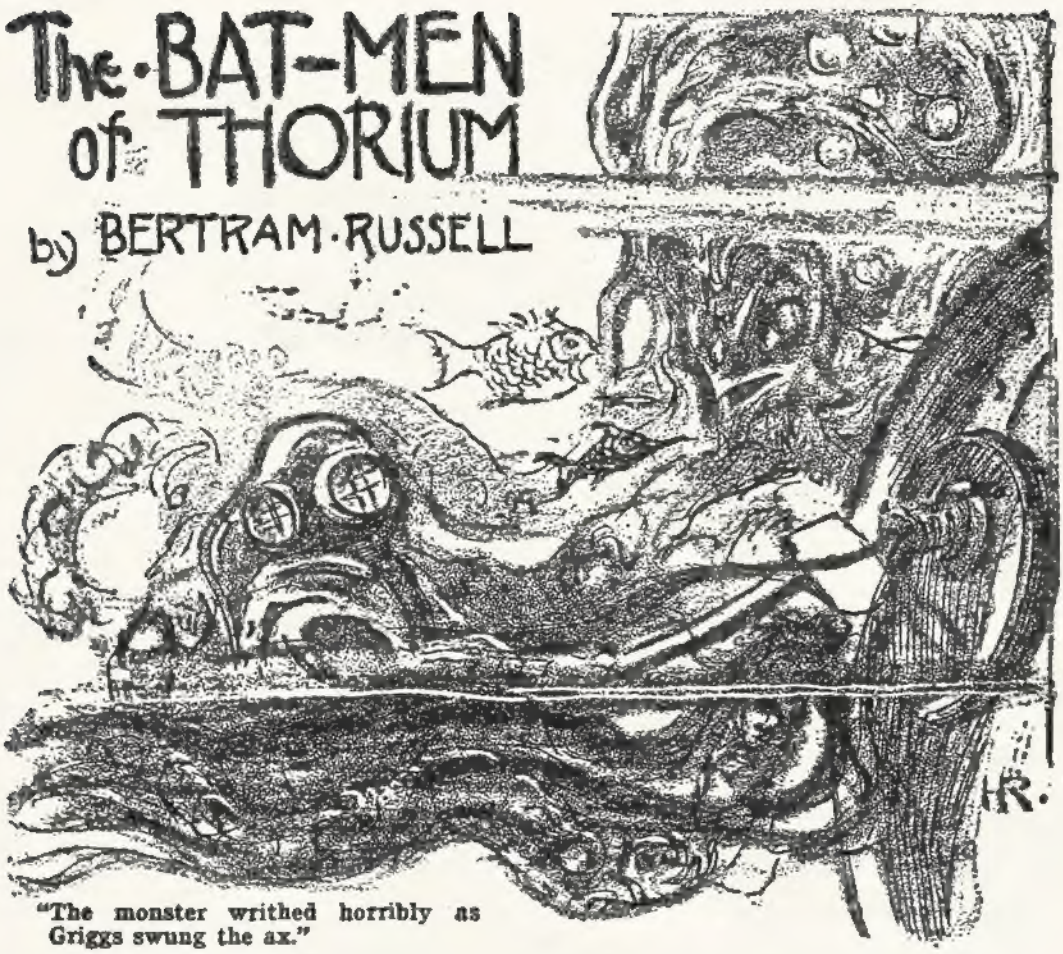
The BAT-MEN of THORIUM

by BERTRAM RUSSELL



"The monster writhed horribly as Griggs swung the ax."

THERE are those who, after reading this astounding history, will say: "It can not be." To them I reply: "It is." As I write this, the hot kisses of Thalia are still upon my lips; her form is still graven on my mind. Have we not produced for evidence hitherto unknown quantities of that wonderful mineral which we were still able to preserve when the final catastrophe overwhelmed Thorium? It sometimes seems to me that the mind of the great Diegon is reaching out to me from that far-away place, buried in a fourth dimension, where we were wont to discuss the mysteries of the universe that interested him so mightily. But, no! Diegon is dead. Did I not see him pass into the stupor of death; was I not the one who folded the gossamer wings across his frail old body in the last act of reverence and love? Perchance Diegon still calls me from some other existence—of that I do not know, but my heart breaks when I think that I shall talk no more with that old man, who for centuries had fought nature, against almost unconquerable odds, and had finally been overwhelmed.

I had long known that Professor Perry had contemplated some such trip as the one he finally made, but that he had intended to include me in the expedition came as something of a shock. It might have been because I always sat open-mouthed, and listened to his every word when he made his weekly visit to my father,

to discuss the most recent theories and the latest advancements of scientific thought.

At least, he greatly surprized me one evening in July, when he said with a restrained excitement which I had never before seen him exhibit, "The craft is now complete; she was turned over to me by the shipyards today. I shall make my start next week. How would you like to take command of the expedition?"

I was thunderstruck. My slight experience during the World War had been in the United States navy, and I had even put in some time on submarines, but I had never had command of one, and I knew that the professor's craft was a submersible, and moreover a submersible of a very unusual type. I hardly knew how to answer his question. I burned as any young man would to go on this expedition, but I feared my knowledge was insufficient.

"She's very easy to handle, I am told," said the professor, understanding the cause of my indecision. "Suppose you take a run over to the shipyards tomorrow and inspect her. After that, you will know better whether you want to make the trip or not."

My father entered at this moment.

"So you're all ready, at last, eh?" he said as he shook the professor warmly by the hand. "Gee, but I'd like to go with you."

"What's to prevent you?" said the professor.

"I really can't leave my business. If I do, those Consolidated fellows will simply cut the ground from under my feet while I am away. Much as I'd like to accompany you, I'll have to pass it up. Where are you going to begin?"

The professor thought for a moment. "I believe I will set a course that will bring us in the Pacific Ocean somewhere about midway between the Samoa islands and the Hawaiian group. That region of the ocean has been very carelessly explored at the surface, to say nothing of the regions below. I venture to say that we shall unearth—or rather unwater—a few surprizes for the scientific world. They have found sharks, perfect in every way but only eight inches long, at great ocean depths. Why should there not be octopi as big as this house, or serpents a hundred yards in length? After all, if life originated in the sea, which it seems undoubtedly to have done, is it not rather more than probable that the great monsters of the deep, which are known to have existed, are still living unhampered at the bottom of the ocean? I hope also to bring up specimens of rare shellfish which live a hermit life on the ocean bed."

"But is it not too dark at the bottom of the ocean to see anything at all?" queried my father.

"Yes. Under ordinary conditions, it is quite impossible to see, even in the clearest water, after a descent of a few dozen feet. But I have provided against that by having powerful Klieg lights in specially prepared casings affixed to the shell of the submersible. These lights are controlled from the interior of the ship, and are capable of being projected in any direction and at any angle. I shall be able to illuminate the entire ocean in the vicinity of the ship, both above and below us, as well as all around. I have also equipped the boat with ultra-violet lighting, so that I can examine the denizens of the deep under its influence. It may be that they are in some way affected by its rays, as I have long suspected."

"I suppose there is no danger of your being crushed by the enormous pressures that exist at the bottom of the sea?" said my father.

The professor smiled. "No, indeed," he replied. "I have carefully calculated all the mechanics of the thing, and I have designed a craft which, not merely because of its great physical strength—I mean by that the

strength of the materials which are used in the construction of it, and the thickness of the hull—but also because of its unique shape, is able to withstand pressures of more than double those which it is calculated exist at the ocean floor. It has been claimed by some that it is impossible to construct a ship that will withstand the enormous pressures found there, and perhaps this is true if the strength of the materials used is alone taken into consideration, but we all know that there are shell-fish that inhabit the bed of the ocean, and their shells are capable of withstanding all known pressures. The fundamental principle of the submarine which I have devised is the same as that of the shell-fish. So I have no fears on that score—none whatever."

"Have you made adequate provisions for your supply of air while submerged?"

"Yes. I have almost an air manufactory. I have a liquid air compressor, and an oxygen apparatus, which removes the oxygen from the carbon dioxide that is produced when we breathe. So, I have an almost infallible supply of fresh air. If all else fails, however, I have compressed oxygen in cylinders that will support life for twenty-four hours."

"You have apparently forgotten nothing," said my father admiringly.

"Wait till Ben has a look at the craft. He will tell us a dozen things lacking," said the professor, turning to me. "By the way, here is a pass that will admit you aboard. Not everyone is allowed to inspect the ship, which is very closely guarded."

He wrote a note, and signing it passed it across to me.

It was with no slight degree of excitement that I stepped aboard the ship the following morning. Far from finding that he had omitted things, I was continually impressed with his foresight and knowledge. He seemed absolutely to have anticipated everything. Of course, the submarine was radio-equipped, but when I looked into the tanks and laboratories that were to care for the specimens that we were to collect, I marveled. The ship itself was a great deal larger than any submarine I had hitherto seen, and the tanks it held could have accommodated a shoal of sharks without overcrowding. I noticed its odd shape. It was almost round. I discovered that it had more than one propeller. In fact, there was actually a screw projecting from the top part of the vessel. This, of course, was to enable the craft to rise, helicopter style. Glass windows of great strength and thickness but wonderful transparency were set in many different parts of the vessel. It would be possible to examine the surrounding water from all angles, and also from above.

The control room rather staggered me at first. It contained devices I had never seen before. Here were depth meters that registered miles below the surface, pressure meters that spoke in thousands of tons, a dozen different devices for submerging the craft, and as many more for raising her. Forward and aft propellers there were for steadying the ship in a current, and a multitude of devices the use of which I could not even guess. The quarters were elaborate. Electric lighting was installed throughout, and I could not imagine anything more, necessary for either the comfort or efficiency of the expedition.

The professor interrupted my examination. I heard him crossing the gangplank and descending the companionway. Clapping me on the shoulder, he said gleefully, "Well, do you feel like commanding her?"

I could only stammer my thanks at being allowed to take this task of such responsibility. I might even then have remained undecided had I not remembered that the professor himself had designed the ship, and must

therefore understand every part of its mechanism. He would always be near to advise me in case of need.

Thus it happened that I became master of the *Atlantis*, as we fancifully christened the craft in which we were going to search for lost continents at the bed of the ocean.

From then on, I was kept busy superintending the loading of the stores, fuel oil, scientific apparatus and the thousand and one things that have to be taken along on such an expedition.

One day I heard a voice in a strange dialect behind me as I stood on the dock watching a slingload of rifles going aboard.

"Strike me pink if that ain't the queerest-looking fish I ever seed. What yuh goin' to do with all them popguns, mister? I thought as 'ow the war was all done, and the 'Uns pretty busy payin' reparations. D'ye figure there's a few o' them *untersee* boats still around or something?"

I turned to look at my questioner. He was a little cockney, dressed in a blue wool sweater, and was lounging against the gangplank with a dirty clay pipe in his mouth. It came to me that I should need an old hand in the crew, and I thought I spotted a sturdy seafarer here. I explained that the rifles were to enable us to capture certain denizens of the deep which we hoped to bring back with us. I told him there was even a mitrailleuse installed in the vessel which was capable of firing through the hull of the ship, and into the water.

"Now yuh don't say so? Well, I'll be blowed. I served in 'is Majesty's submarines, but swelp me bob, this 'ere fish 'as 'em all skinned. Maybe yuh wants another man, Captain?" he said, producing a handful of dirty discharges, and Board of Trade books.

"So you're an A. B.?"

"Yus. And if yuh want a good 'elmsman or Q. M. there ain't none better than Bill Griggs, though I does say it myself as shouldn't. There ain't no better brarse polisher on the western ocean than me, and that's a fact. No, nor the eastern or the southern—or in Davey Jones's locker."

"There may be some element of chance connected with this trip," I said cautiously.

"Charnce—that's me middle nime. Bill Charnce Griggs. I thrives on adwenture. Say, 'ow abaht it, mister? Is it a go?"

"Yes," I smiled. "It's a go."

At length the ship was ready for sea, and the final farewells were said. As I took the wheel, and piloted her outside the heads, I could not help wondering how the voyage would end. Could I have foreseen what its termination would be, and the adventures which we were destined to go through, would I have gone? I wonder.

The vessel answered every demand I made upon her with clocklike precision. Never had I known a craft to handle more easily. For days we glided along with that swift undulatory motion characteristic of the submersible, through brightly gleaming waters, the gay-colored fishes darting away at every turn of the screw. Several times we stopped to collect specimens of some new species which the professor wanted for our collection. Two of the starboard tanks were full of these denizens of the deep.

Griggs proved himself all that he had said: a conscientious and efficient helmsman, and a good seaman. I was the more surprized, therefore, one day to be awakened by being thrown out of my bunk. When I had recovered from the rather severe bump which my head had received, I saw that something was violently wrong. The vessel was no longer on an even keel. In fact, she was apparently heading nose foremost for the bottom. Scrambling as best I could to the chart room and pilot house, I found things in a state of chaos. Griggs was hanging on to the wheel, trying to steady the ship; the professor lay on the floor, or rather on one of the walls, for the sub-

marine was still in a perpendicular position. Instruments rolled from side to side, and the vessel was apparently uncontrollable.

"She won't answer the bloomin' 'elm, sir," shouted Griggs as I entered. This was very apparent. Quickly I inspected everything, but nowhere could I discover anything amiss. The depth meter showed the craft to be descending at a terrific speed. If something were not soon done to stop this awful fall, we should be smashed to pieces by hitting the bottom. The ballast tanks were empty, and I was at a loss to understand the cause of the trouble. The ship began now to spiral around, corkscrew fashion, and we were all becoming very dizzy.

The professor grabbed at me from his recumbent position. Drawing me down so that my ear was close over his mouth, he spoke.

"Start the gyroscope, or we'll all die of vertigo," he said.

I realized the sense of this precaution, and moving to the controls I started up the huge rotors, of which there were two. Straining in every plate and bolt, as though resisting some terrific unseen force, the submersible gradually assumed the horizontal position once more, and we were able to stand erect. The depth meters still showed the ship to be descending at an increasing speed.

"I never saw no ship dive like this before," said Griggs hoarsely. "Looks like we're all headed straight for Davey Jones's locker, and no mistike."

"Don't talk, but reverse the engines," I shouted, and he reversed the controls, but except for a slight shivering, the motion of the craft was not appreciably altered. I tried to set the elevating blades to bring us to the surface, but the ship stubbornly refused to obey any other force than that which was relentlessly dragging her to the bottom. Everything seemed to be in order, but still she continued to dive, more and more every minute. We were now fourteen thousand feet below the surface, and dropping fast.

The professor was perplexed. We started the Klieg lights, and by their light saw fish and weed flying past us in great numbers. But always their course seemed to be upward; in other words, there was no denying that we were actually descending.

"The only thing that I can say is that we're caught in some hidden maelstrom, some unknown vortex that is sucking us down—God knows where," said the professor in troubled accents. "If we could only get out of it, there is a possibility that we should be all right, but as long as the *Atlantis* refuses to answer her helm we're utterly helpless."

Undoubtedly he had hit on the truth, and I was forced to agree with him. We could only stand still and wait for the worst, trying the various controls at odd moments in hopes that the ship would respond.

After several minutes of this headlong descent, the controls indicated that we were not falling so rapidly, and we seemed to be going in a more slantwise direction than before. The gyroscopes were still necessary, however, to maintain our equilibrium. At length, our progress became almost horizontal, and the falling ceased. Whether we were on the bottom of the ocean, we could not tell. We therefore started the searchlights once more, and were very careful to examine the water beneath us. Several times I thought I saw the bed of the ocean below us, in the powerful searchlights, but I could not be wholly sure. After some minutes of this progress, the ship stopped, with a thud which threw us all to the deck.

"Gor' blimey — we've struck!" groaned Griggs, making frantic efforts to work the controls. It's goodnight now, for all of us."

Plainly, our progress had been arrested. The screws whirled uselessly, and our elevators refused to work.

The lights showed us that we were resting on a rocky floor. Undoubtedly we were at the bottom of the ocean. Fish swirled wildly past us on all sides, as though drawn by some powerful current, probably by the maelstrom which had sucked us down. But why were we stationary? Why were we not rushing along in the current?

Griggs supplied the answer. Suddenly he pointed a trembling finger at the port light. "Look there," he said, "just look there, and tell me what you see."

Together, the professor and I looked, and recoiled in horror.

What we saw was in effect a disk, about ten inches across, of superscribed rings. These rings were all composed of quivering flesh. They lay flat against the glass of the window. With one accord we drew back. It was the sucker of what must in effect have been a very leviathan among octopi. If one single sucker on a tentacle were ten inches in diameter, we could only guess at the length of the tentacle itself, and by inference the actual size of the octopus.

We climbed to the conning-tower, and from the windows we saw a sight that chilled us to the marrow. Two enormous tentacles of the octopus were coiled around the hull of the ship, seeming to stretch away out of range of the powerful lights. But, from time to time, I caught the reflection of the searchlights in the eyes of the brute. I shudder even now, when I think of those eyes. Their baleful glare was fixed unblinkingly upon us and they must have measured a foot across. Slowly they seemed to be advancing upon us, but that might have been only an effect of the imagination. The ship began to shudder, as the monster tried to draw us into its gorge. If we did not do something in a hurry, we were doomed.

"We've got to hack them legs off, sir," said Griggs. "It's a ticklish job, but if you've got an armored diving-suit, I'll go out and try my luck."

The brave fellow stood ready.

"But, the pressure will crush you to jelly," I said.

"It won't no more crush me than that big squid there," said Griggs.

"By George, that's right," put in the professor. "What's an octopus doing at these depths, anyway? I can't understand it. But certainly, if it is not crushed, Griggs with a steel suit on would not be."

"Better let me try it, sir," said Griggs again.

I opened the locker where the suits were kept, and rapidly we assisted Griggs in donning the suit. Before we adjusted the helmet, he shook hands with both of us, and then, with the ax in his hands, he stepped through the exit chamber into the water. We saw him climb upon the deck. He lifted the ax, and swung it. We could barely feel the thuds of the blows as he hacked at the leathery tissue of the monster. Evidently it was not used to this sort of treatment, for it writhed horribly as the tentacle was hewn in two. Griggs was almost hidden in a cloud of red fluid which now surrounded him. Still, by the blows, we could feel that he was freeing us. He had evidently chopped one of the tentacles in two, for we saw him cross the ship and advance upon the other. The blows commenced again. We watched breathlessly. Griggs was almost through the last remaining arm, when the monster, evidently tired of its passive part, began to advance upon us. Slowly, evilly, the great eyes loomed nearer. I trembled for the brave fellow working desperately to save our lives. He had evidently seen the impending peril, for he worked frantically at the few remaining sinews. The craft was beginning to move once more. The meters showed we were gliding along again in a horizontal direction. Griggs had severed the arm, and with a great bound, we started

forward again. He almost lost his balance at the unexpected motion, and I saw him staggering across the top of the submarine, grasping wildly at everything that offered him a hold. I noticed also that he was ducking his head at frequent intervals, as though to avoid something that threatened him from above. At last he had the door open, and after a few seconds was back again in the pilot house with us. Speedily we removed the diving-suit, and saw a pale, haggard Griggs.

"Got any brandy?" he gasped.

He drained the proffered glass at a gulp, and sank onto the settee. After a few seconds, he looked at us.

"It's 'orrible," he said.

"What is?" we asked together breathlessly.

"Why—this. We're under the earth, and under the sea, at the same time," said Griggs.

We looked at each other in bewilderment. Had the experience turned his head? It certainly looked like it. Griggs saw the look, and understood.

"Oh—I'm all right now," he said. "I tell you we're under the earth. There's a wall of rock all around the ship. Look out and see for yourself, if you think I'm crazy. I had to duck my head a dozen times to dodge the rocks above us."

We wasted no time in returning to the port lights. The glare of the searchlights showed us that Griggs was right. On each side, and above and below, there was a sheer wall of rock, that rushed past at a mad speed.

"This must be some tunnel at the bottom of the sea—perhaps a volcanic tube," said the professor after he had studied the formation for a while.

"Then, that would account for the low pressure, and the presence of the octopus," I added. "Surrounded by this protecting wall of rock, it was not subjected to the terrific pressure of the ocean above. He has evidently anchored himself there, in a place where he does not have to hunt for his food, but has it brought to him by the current. Those fish are sucked into his mouth, so to speak."

"You must be right," answered the professor. "But what will happen to us?"

"We just have to wait and see what happens. Either we shall hit something and all be drowned, or we shall get out of this current after a while. We can't stay in it forever."

So we stood around, idle, looking at one another's pale faces, in a tension of suspense, wondering what would happen next. We were prepared for almost any marvel, but not quite for the one which actually happened.

We were carried along by the current, at a vast speed, for an hour or more, each minute fearing that we should strike one of the projecting spurs that surrounded us on all sides. But the current was so powerful that we seemed to keep well to the middle of the tunnel.

At length we experienced a violent twisting and leaping, after which the boat lay motionless.

"Well, that's over, anyway. But where are we now?" said the professor.

The searchlight now failed to help us. All around was dense blackness, a thick and inky body of water, which began as soon as our lights faded away. No movement of any kind was apparent. A look at the depth gage, however, told a different story. We were slowly rising. After ascending for about fifty feet, we stopped again. The searchlights revealed to us an astounding fact. We were at the surface. Indubitably we lay at rest on the surface of a motionless body of water. We could see it rippling around the submarine as she gently floated at rest. But all around was an inky darkness—impenetrable, such as I had never before seen.

"Well, we're not much better off than before," I remarked. "I'm going outside. Help me with the diving-suit, you fellows."

I DONNED the suit, and taking a box of matches in a water-tight case, stepped through the exit tanks onto the deck of the ship. I took the packet of matches and carefully removed the box. Gingerly I extracted a match from the box, and struck it. It sputtered, and to my astonishment, burst into flame, burning brilliantly to the end. If there was flame, there must be air. I re-entered the ship, and as soon as my suit was removed, told the others of my experiment with the matches. But they had seen it already, and the professor agreed with me that there must be air or oxygen outside, and it would probably be safe to go on deck.

Cautiously, therefore, we opened the hatch on deck, and sniffed at the air. It was pure and fresh. Although this was what we had expected, we could not help looking at one another in astonishment. To find pure fresh air five miles below the level of the sea was indeed a strange thing.

"I can't explain this darkness," began the professor, and stopped, awed at the hollowness with which his voice re-echoed.

"Did you notice how strange that sounded?" he began again. "It would almost seem that we are in a great cavern, and yet it can hardly be that, for I see no walls, or roof. Yet, this darkness is puzzling. How do we come to find this still lake at the bottom of the ocean? I confess——"

"Didn't I tell you we're under the earth and under the sea too?" interrupted Griggs eagerly.

"What do you mean?" I asked, puzzled.

"Why—don't you see? We reached the bottom of the Pacific, didn't we? We got swept into a tunnel, didn't we? Well, then—where was we going when we was travelin' through that tunnel? Don't you see?"

"No. I don't," I replied.

"Wait a minute—I think I do," said the professor. "You mean?—of course you must be right! Why didn't I think of it before? Griggs is right," he repeated, turning to me. "We are inside the earth now. We are in a place where man has never dreamed of exploring—we have penetrated the earth's crust, and are now beneath it."

I was dumfounded as this startling truth became more clear to me every second. I understood it all; that is, all except the pure air which we found here. That was a puzzle. There could be no atmosphere down here, yet the air was the same, or very similar to that which we breathed at the surface. I found my mind whirling in all sorts of contradictions about forces. Were we supported here by gravity, or by centrifugal force? Were we lying on the outer or inner edge of this space which surrounded us? I understood the complete darkness. No daylight could penetrate here. We should have to adjust all our ideas of day and night. There would be no more sun, moon, and stars for us if we stayed here. But could we stay here? What were we to live on after our scanty supply of food was exhausted? Surely there could not be life or vegetation in this funereal place! The outlook seemed gloomy at the best. We should doubtless perish here of starvation. Our lighting system would fail us in a few hours; in fact, it was already beginning to dim, under the terrific strain which we had imposed upon it. After that would be darkness and starvation—a very dismal prospect.

Evidently some such thoughts had occupied the minds of my companions, for the professor spoke sharply.

"Well — standing mooning here won't do any good. We must get the motors running again, and try to learn all we can about this place, before our lights fail us."

There was no gainsaying the practicality of his reply, and we therefore filed down inside the ship again. After starting the motors, Griggs took the helm under my instructions, and

we very carefully cruised ahead at slow speed. The compass seemed still to respond to some magnetic attraction—probably the same one which had influenced it at the surface—and I noted the course to be approximately west north west.

We extinguished our searchlights, intending to reserve them only for cases of emergency, and cruised along in the inky darkness. There is no such darkness to be found on earth's crust, except in the darkest depths of our mines. There had never been any light here; consequently there was not even that faint phosphorescence or radiation which can be seen on earth in even the darkest places. Here the blackness was absolute. Strain our eyes as we would, though we knew it was hopeless, we could not pierce the gloom. The silence, too, was absolute. No faintest breath of air, no ripple of wave or song of bird here to break the monotony! It was apparently a place where Death reigned supreme and unchallenged.

We had even extinguished the lights inside the ship, to conserve our power, and stood around in the chart room, in a very panic of apprehension. The retina of my eye, still excited by the glare of the searchlights, began to play me strange tricks. I saw blinding circles of light, which darted around, no matter in which direction I turned my pupils. I know it was only a reflex nervous action, but still it disconcerted me greatly. After some little time, even these visions disappeared, and I saw nothing but that dense night, a darkness which I could almost *feel*.

How long we proceeded thus, I can not say. Undoubtedly it seemed a much longer time than it actually was, but I should estimate that it was not less than ninety minutes. In this the professor agrees with me, though Griggs says it was more nearly three hours. At all events, I was beginning to notice a strange difference in our surroundings. I could hardly explain it, but it was very definite. I feared to mention it, thinking perhaps my wits were playing me false, and so I waited a sign from my companions.

It was not long in coming. I felt a tug at my arm, and heard the professor's voice at my ear.

"Am I dreaming, or do you see what I see?" he whispered in awe.

"I see it also," I said. "Light—but light of a kind I have never before met with anywhere."

"Not daylight at least—of that I am positive," said the professor.

"More like moonlight, says I," added Griggs.

He was correct. It was a very faint luminous glow, like the rays from a pale moon on a misty night, with one exception. The rays were not blue, but green in color—a ghastly green that made our faces look like demon masks, and changed every smile into a snarl.

The professor was absorbed in speculations as to the nature of the light, but could arrive at no satisfactory conclusion. I was busily engaged in searching the—I nearly said "sky"—regions aloft, for some signs of stars or moon, when I was interrupted by a shout from Griggs.

"Land on the port bow, sir!" he cried, at the same time spinning the wheel hard over.

Reducing the motors to half speed, we cruised carefully along the border of this land—island, or whatever it was. The pale light seemed to be increasing, but whether it was some sort of dawn, or whether merely because we were approaching nearer to the source of light, I did not know.

Taking the binoculars, I carefully focused them on the land, now skimming past us slowly. I could not repress a gasp of admiration. The sight which met my eyes was one of stupendous beauty. Rising from the banks was a mighty forest. Colossal trees lost their tops in the upper air, and

their foliage was of a kind such as I had never seen anywhere before. The nearest thing I could think of was a forest in the middle of winter—entirely blanketed with a heavy fall of snow. The leaves, if such they can be called, were like puffs of cotton wool. Their shapes were as many as the imagination could conjure up. In another respect, also, this huge subterranean forest resembled an earth-forest in winter: the trees were all white—absolutely white. There was not a tree of color to be found anywhere, except that faint greenish tinge by which everything was illuminated.

"White flora! . . . ah, yes, of course . . . no daylight, without which no flora can be green. A forest in the bowels of the earth . . . marvelous, quite marvelous! I must certainly get some specimens of this. It will electrify the scientific world. . . ."

" 'Ave yuh figgered some way of gettin' back to the world, then, perfessor?" said Griggs, eagerly.

The professor was recalled from his scientific speculations.

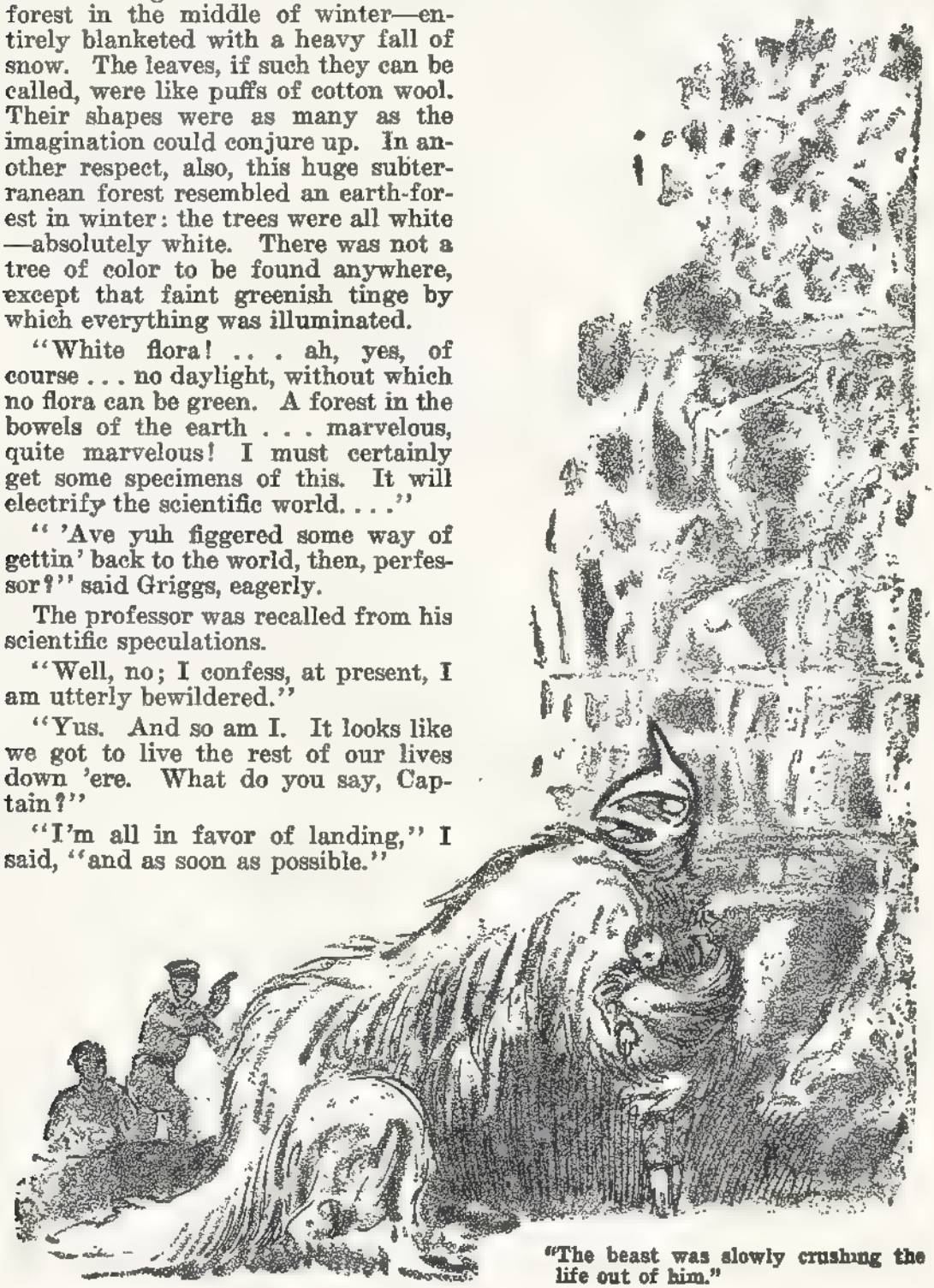
"Well, no; I confess, at present, I am utterly bewildered."

"Yus. And so am I. It looks like we got to live the rest of our lives down 'ere. What do you say, Captain?"

"I'm all in favor of landing," I said, "and as soon as possible."

"I'm with you, sir. Let's look for a likely place."

After a few minutes more of cruis-



"The beast was slowly crushing the life out of him."

ing, we came upon a cove, where a sloping beach offered some possibilities of a landing. We ran the nose of the ship against the soft sand of the beach, and opening the hatch, prepared to explore the shore.

The professor went first, and we followed. Our progress was made in complete silence, and we were approaching the edge of the forest when the professor, who in his eagerness to inspect the new flora had advanced more quickly than we, gave a shriek. Running quickly to his side, we found him in a horrible predicament. Some great ugly white monster had him in two long hairy arms, and was slowly crushing the life out of him. Not a sound came from the beast; the silence was broken only by the professor's cries for help.

"Better try a bullet on him, sir," said Griggs.

I had thought to strap my automatic about me when we left the submarine, and now drew the gun. The great bulk of the brute was facing sideways, and I had a fair chance to shoot at it, without hitting the professor. Taking a careful aim, I fired.

The shot rang out hollowly, and the enormous brute sank to the ground, dead, releasing the professor as it died. I marveled that a single shot from an automatic could kill so mighty a beast, but there was no time to reason the thing out, for a dozen of its mates came bounding through the undergrowth, and chased by this flock of white monsters, we fled to the ship.

As we ran, I heard the flapping of wings about us, and saw many forms flying over our heads, keeping pace with us. These were white also, and flew with a gently heaving motion, almost silently. In fact the whole episode had been compassed in silence. There had been no rending or snarling, no groans when the brute died—only the professor's shrieks, and the report from my automatic. Hastily scrambling aboard the ship again, we clapped the hatch down, and, starting the motors, backed away from the land.

"Phew—I always 'eard as 'ow 'ell was under the hearth—this must be it. I believe we're all dead, and bein' tortured for our sins up on the hearth there. Gor' blimey—I 'opes we don't meet the Old Man, now," groaned Griggs.

I could not help smiling at his comical notions, serious though our predicament was. We continued to cruise slowly along the coast, the flying creatures keeping exact pace with us as we did so. The flapping of their wings prevented our getting a good look at them, but their every movement was one of grace as they sailed serenely above us. Every time we changed our course, these creatures did the same. They were evidently bent upon following us.

The professor had been examining them with the greatest curiosity. He uttered a startling exclamation:

"Good heavens! My word! Another branch of the *genus homo*. . . ."

"A branch of the what?" I interrupted smilingly.

"The *genus homo*—man. They are men—real live men—but of a kind unknown at the earth's surface. See—take a look," and he handed me the glasses. "They resemble in all respects but one the man of the surface. The only difference is their wings."

I looked, and could not dispute this statement. Here was a race of men with wings, which seemed to be composed of a tissue attached to the arms, and were in some cases as much as ten feet across. The wings were almost transparent, and of a gauzy, gossamerlike texture—much like the wings of the dragon-fly. The faces of these creatures were all of singular beauty, and they showed a high degree of intelligence.

But our attention was diverted from the creatures—the bat-men, as Griggs called them—to the land. The

forest was rapidly thinning, and after a short time it gave way to a sandy plain which stretched away for a great distance. The light became still brighter as we proceeded, and we could distinguish everything with great distinctness.

"We might as well increase the speed as long as the light continues," I said, and the submarine darted forward at full speed.

She was able to travel on the surface at a speed of some forty miles an hour, but the bat-men seemed to have no difficulty in keeping up with us. Without apparent exertion, they sailed along above our heads.

"Look—they're going, now," said Griggs, and as we looked we saw them fly off at a great speed ahead of us.

"Gone to tell their friends, I suppose," I said jestingly.

Rapidly the contours of the land changed. The rank vegetation disappeared, and carefully cultivated fields lined the water's edge. The plants were quite different from any we had seen before, however. We noticed scores of the batlike creatures at work in the fields, who flew aloft when they saw us, and sailed with us as the others had done. Our progress was marked by an ever-increasing army of them; soon they numbered hundreds, all flying aloft in complete silence.

We were now approaching what looked like a city, though in few ways resembling the cities of the surface. The buildings had no roofs, probably because there was never any rain here, and the walls seemed to be rather divisions that separated the property of one from another than for any other purpose—that of protection from the elements, for instance.

As we approached the city, we slowed down to a mere crawl, and at this, many of the bat-men began to march along the shores, keeping pace with us. Still others were flying overhead. Slowly, ever slowly, we nosed our way in to the shore and to the beautiful white city. In silence, the bat-men edged away from our ship, and, as we opened the hatch on to the deck, and stepped out with revolvers in our hands, they eased back, as though uncertain how to act. Plainly, they had never seen anything like us before. They made no attempt to do us harm, however, and we therefore carefully ran the submarine ashore, and stepped out.

This was the signal for them to close in and circle around us, examining our features and clothing with minutest care. It was an uncanny sight, those beautiful white figures, with their gossamer wings folded about them, stroking the clothing we wore, peering into our eyes, and examining us generally. Thus it was that we came to Thorium.

While we were standing thus, not knowing what to do, or how to act, we saw a shuffling taking place at the outskirts of the circle. The creatures parted, to make way for someone, evidently an important personage, who came slowly to us, borne on some sort of litter, which was carried by eight of the bat-men. As the equipage came closer, we saw a venerable man, with a flowing white beard that stretched to his waist, who sat within. His wings were folded about him, and he turned to right and to left as he passed the white creatures who stood motionless and evidently in great adoration. With his lips he appeared to be blessing them, though we heard no sound. At length the litter came before us, and the bearers stopped, setting it upon the ground. Aided by one of the bearers, the old man descended, and stood before us.

I had never seen such a face. It seemed to contain all the love, intelligence and wisdom of all time. Something of this must have struck the professor also, for he remarked to himself: "God bless my soul—what an intellect!"

I had barely heard the remark, but my astonishment was profound when the old man before us shook his head very slowly, while a smile of great beauty illumined his features.

"I believe he heard what you said, and understood you," I said in a whisper.

This time I was sure he had understood, for he nodded eagerly to me, and continued to smile in an encouraging way.

"Will wonders never cease?" muttered the professor in complete bewilderment. "A race of creatures at the center of the earth—bat-men, indeed—who understand the American tongue. Marvelous, simply marvelous!"

At this, the old man seemed puzzled. He knit his brows in wonder, and the smile faded away. Plainly he was at a loss to comprehend the professor's meaning.

"Speak to him," I said.

The professor turned quickly to him.

"I trust you will pardon my ill manners, sir," he began, at which the smile again lit up the old man's features, and he plainly indicated his acquiescence. "Am I to believe that you are able to understand a language which you can not possibly have heard before, when, if I am to take the evidence of my senses, you do not use vocal methods of conversation at all?"

The old man nodded again, vigorously, and made some movement with his mouth, but we heard no sound. I felt as sure, as though I had heard him articulate the words, however, that he meant us to understand that this was so. He had fixed the professor with his piercing eyes. They seemed to bore through him like fire. Under his glance, the professor was visibly moved. He turned to me.

"He wants to know where we have come from, I think," he said. "I could almost hear the words issue from his mouth."

"I felt the same question also," I answered.

Catching the eye of the old man, I saw that he was again nodding to us.

The professor turned to him again.

"As far as we are able to guess, we have penetrated the earth's crust, and are now inside the globe. You, of course, will not understand this who have never been outside, but for the present, it must suffice if I tell you that you are, as I believe, now living inside of a great globe, which we call Earth. This globe is spinning through infinite space—something else which will puzzle you. But of these we will speak later; at the moment we are particularly interested in knowing if you have a source of food supply here in the bowels of the earth. It is necessary that we who live at the surface eat at frequent intervals; we sincerely hope that you are bound by the same necessity. Is this so?"

I had been watching the old man's face as the professor spoke. I could see that he had understood much of the other's speech, but he had evidently been puzzled at the mention of a globe spinning in space. He had now fixed us with those magnetic eyes of his, and we received the impression that we were to follow him. The eight bearers now took up the litter once more; and preceded by the old man, and followed by the crowd of bat-men, we walked slowly over the sandy soil in the direction of the city.

Everything was strange to us—the white fields, looking as though a heavy fall of snow had covered them, that stretched away into the distance, the fantastic green illumination that seemed to come out of nowhere, the darkness overhead—all was new to us. The strange thing is that we did not find the continuous whiteness annoying, or monotonous. It was relieved by the multiform contour of the vegetation. It seemed that no two trees, shrubs, or bushes were of the same species. The march was therefore frequently interrupted by the professor,

who stopped to examine each startling variation from the general range.

At length we came to the city—a city without roofs.

"How different from our earth cities, with their glaring signboards advertising the newest in penny candies, or the popular drink of the day," I thought.

No rattle of street cars here, no shouting venders who tried to sell you what you didn't want! There were what looked like stores. The shopkeepers reclined upon couches in the midst of their wares, which lay about them on the ground. Objects of the most curious nature, these were. They seemed to be mostly art objects; at least they were of great beauty, as was in fact everything in this underground metropolis.

It was here that we saw the first touches of color. Drapes of some filmy material, probably woven from the fiber of the strange trees we had seen, were colored in vivid hues—not the colors of earth, however, but the most gorgeous reds and violets.

The professor interrupted my thoughts at this juncture with an exclamation: "Can it be possible that these people have mastered the art of making the infra-red and ultra-violet bands of the spectrum visible? It would almost seem that this is so, for I have never before seen such colors. They look like reds and violets, but they are not."

The old man turned in his litter at the professor's words, but he was completely mystified. Of course, he could not comprehend the nature of light, who had never seen any real light.

"I must make a note to explain to him the spectrum and its component colors," said the professor, writing on his cuff with a stubby pencil that he always carried for such notes as his absent-minded brain might forget.

The old man seemed pleased at this, and nodded a smiling acquiescence.

At length we entered one of the buildings, by passing under a magnificent archway into a huge court. The walls and floor seemed to be of a brightly polished marble, and here also was a variety of color to which our eyes were quite unaccustomed. Through corridor after corridor, lined with the bat-men, who stood with bowed heads, much as our servants do on the earth's crust, we proceeded, and halted at last in a spacious hall, whose walls seemed to radiate some sort of iridescence, whose lofty columns lost themselves in the darkness above. Magnificent drapes hung from the cornices, thick carpets of the most wondrous designs lay on the floor. The litter was carried to a sort of dais which stood upon several flat steps.

The old man alighted, and seated himself upon this chair. He seemed to say to us: "Be at ease—seat yourselves."

We therefore squatted upon the steps around the dais, watching the old man.

Without apparently any command having been given, three servants came from one of the corridors giving upon the great hall. They advanced to the old man, and stood with bowed heads. He seemed to be talking to them, although we heard no word. With a gesture he indicated the three of us squatting at his feet, and in full understanding the three bat-men glided away. Soon they returned with goblets made of a beautiful substance greatly resembling alabaster.

We took one each, and the old man took one. He descended from the dais, and wrapping his gauzy wings about the three of us, he seemed to be blessing us, after which he took up the goblet, and indicating to us to do the same, he drained it at a gulp.

I found the liquid of a strangely piquant taste. It ran like fire through my veins, though I could have sworn there was no alcohol in it. I found

myself with a sharp appetite, evidently the effects of the drink.

The professor had been regarding the old man with a fixed gaze.

"Have you adopted a system of names in your region?" he asked.

The old man nodded in delight, and I felt him to be saying, "Yes. I am called Dagon."

"Did you get the impression of Diegon?" said the professor, turning to me.

"I thought he meant Dagon," I answered.

"Seemed to me more like a swear-word I used to know on earth, years ago," chimed in Griggs.

The old man was partly puzzled by the last speaker. He looked at us again.

"Diegon—is it?" asked the professor, looking at the old man.

He showed by his manner that this was plainly so. He was evidently pleased at the ease with which we understood his telepathic speech.

From this point on, it must be understood that any conversations which I chronicle as having taken place between the dwellers of this region and ourselves were telepathic conversations—that is to say, there was no vocal response on their part. In fact, we soon became tired of using our voices, when we found that they understood our thoughts equally well, and we used vocal methods only in speaking among ourselves; for although we were able to read the thoughts of Diegon and some others down here, we could not understand each other without words. Of course, the answer to this is that Diegon had so perfected his telepathic powers that he could make us understand the powerful radiations from his brain, and could greatly amplify the feeble radiations from our minds, thus making communication possible. After some practise, however, we were actually able to communicate among ourselves by this method, a great advantage when we were talking to Diegon, as we were thus able to understand the drift of any conversation which though unspoken became general. It is interesting to note that we did not always receive the same impression. This is exemplified in the understanding of the old man's name, where I received the impression of "Dagon" and Griggs that of "Doggone."

"I am much interested in the singular beauty of everything in your region," said the professor. "Particularly the faces and forms of your subjects. On earth we have many who are of great hideousness, both of mind and body. I suppose you have achieved this by a long-continued evolution?"

"Evolution?" queried Diegon.

"I mean that as different generations have sprung up, each has been more nearly perfect, until you have now developed a perfect race."

"I do not understand your meaning."

"Let me illustrate for you with an example from the earth-crust life. Centuries ago—you must understand that we up there measure time by means of the sun, which I will explain to you later—we were all savages, who killed each other for food, and were in fact little better than those animals which attacked us on our first arrival in your country."

"Those are the Ottars, who protect us against our enemies," interrupted Diegon.

"Well, we were little better than the Ottars, but we became superior at each new generation, or through each century, and now are, as we say, civilized, though whether our civilization is more nearly perfect than yours, I can not yet say."

"I do not understand all that you say, but the principal ideas are clear to me," said Diegon, as the food was served to us. "You evidently have not yet reached the stage where you

can overcome the processes of decay and death."

"No, indeed," said the professor.

"We have. Now I myself, for instance, have lived for three"—he held up three fingers—"for three Jopals. You will not understand the meaning of Jopals, probably. It represents our time standard. A Jopal is the time taken for this to disintegrate, and return to base metal."

He took from behind him a beautifully colored box of the same alabasterlike material as the goblets from which we had drunk. Removing the lid, he handed it to the professor for examination. He seemed to know instinctively that his more abstruse ideas would be more quickly apprehended by him than by us. The professor examined the tiny fragment of whatever lay within.

"Radium," he exclaimed. "They base their time on the disintegration of the radium atom, and its return to lead. My goodness! that is millions of years!"

"That is the way we measure time, however," said Diegon. "See—here are two expired periods." He produced two of the caskets, which contained tiny particles of a dark metal—undoubtedly lead. "We measure our smaller time periods in terms of the rate of emanation of certain standard radium samples. You see our method is quite as accurate, and more simple than yours, which involves calculations about other worlds and suns, of which I learn from the professor."

We had been eating the meal while engaged in this conversation, and found the strange food exquisite. It consisted chiefly of the white vegetation which we had seen on our arrival, though there were also many fruits, also white, each of which had a different flavor. Most startling of all, perhaps, were the varieties of shell-fish, and some pieces of the tenderest flesh, which like everything else were served uncooked, though treated in some way so that they did not taste raw.

Diegon resumed: "I was about to tell you that we have learned the secrets of life and death. My parents were among the last to die. Now, we are able to prolong our lives indefinitely. We have long ceased to bring new children into existence, for there are already as many as our scant food supply will support. We now live at peace with one another, some, like myself, for instance, engaged in the continual search for new knowledge, and given the charge of those who are unfitted to govern themselves; for you will understand that we are not all of equal intelligence or wisdom. Some of my subjects are only two Jopals old—they have not yet acquired the knowledge which will be theirs in time. Others are engaged in preparing our foodstuffs; others are the creators of music; still others prepare our decorative pieces, and so on. There is no overlapping, and our existence would be one of complete tranquillity, were it not for the Zoags."

"Who are the Zoags?" we asked.

"You will learn soon enough," sighed Diegon, while his face saddened. "They are our enemies. They hate us for our superiority. We do not hate them: we only pity them. They seize every opportunity to harass us. But two Opals since, they carried off Thalia, my beloved daughter, and now hold her a hostage against our submission to them. Much as I love her, though, I will never betray my people by giving in. I have a plan to recover her, of which I will tell you later. It may be that you would care to join me."

"By all means," we said.

"And now, you are doubtless fatigued, and would like to rest."

Again, as if from nowhere, came several attendants, and we knew that we should follow them. Rising,

therefore, and saluting Diegon, we walked slowly from the great hall.

Our silent guides led us through a maze of twisting passages that wound about the palace. On every hand were objects of great beauty. Here and there a servant paused in his task to observe with eyes full of curiosity the three strangely clothed beings without wings who were being conducted through the halls.

At last we emerged from the walls of the palace, and found ourselves in what might be termed a park. At least it showed signs of having been treated artificially. The terraces were too regular, the trees too symmetrical, to be otherwise. Our silent leader conducted us beneath trees, whose woolly foliage swept our cheeks as we marched in single file behind him. At last we found a small house that nestled against a hillside, where a sparkling brook frolicked its way to the great lake which apparently bounded Thorium on all sides.

We entered the house, which had been recently prepared for our coming, and with a silent salute our conductor withdrew. We seated ourselves on some couches which had been provided, and looked at each other. For the first time we were able to sit together alone, in comparative security, and discuss our plight. We were, I think, by this time quite accustomed to the strange green light under which everything seemed so weird and uncanny. Yet I could not restrain a smile as I looked at the faithful Griggs, whose wobegone features and rueful frown looked really laughable under the ghostly luminance.

The professor spoke the thoughts of all of us when he said: "How the deuce are we going to get out of this place? The people seem very kindly disposed toward us, and there is apparently no immediate prospect of our starving; yet I confess that I am ill at ease in the presence of these beings, who can read a thought which is actually never uttered."

"You said it, sir," cried Griggs. "I still thinks as 'ow we're goin' ter meet the Old Man pretty soon. Oh Crickey—wot wouldn't I give to be sittin' in the Red Lion down the Old Kent Road!"

"Although it sounds quite absurd, I feel that there ought to be some way for us to get out of this underworld," I said, after a few moments' thought.

"Thanks for them kind words, sir. I wish I thought so too," said Griggs, sorrowfully.

"Upon what grounds do you base your beliefs?" asked the professor with renewed interest.

When he put the question to me in that way, I felt rather foolish. I had no grounds for such a belief; in fact I had spoken rather in the spirit of bolstering up my own falling hope than from any reasoned conclusion. Yet, as I thought the matter over, I found some grounds at least for thinking that we could perhaps escape from this place, and regain our fellow beings in the world that now seemed so far away from us.

"We got here in the first place, and it seems that it ought to be possible to get out again," I said at last rather lamely. "If there is a way in, there ought to be a way out."

The professor seemed distinctly disappointed at this weak answer. He was turning away to inspect a new variety of foliage that lay on the ground near him, when suddenly, as though caught by some invisible hand, it was whisked away out of sight.

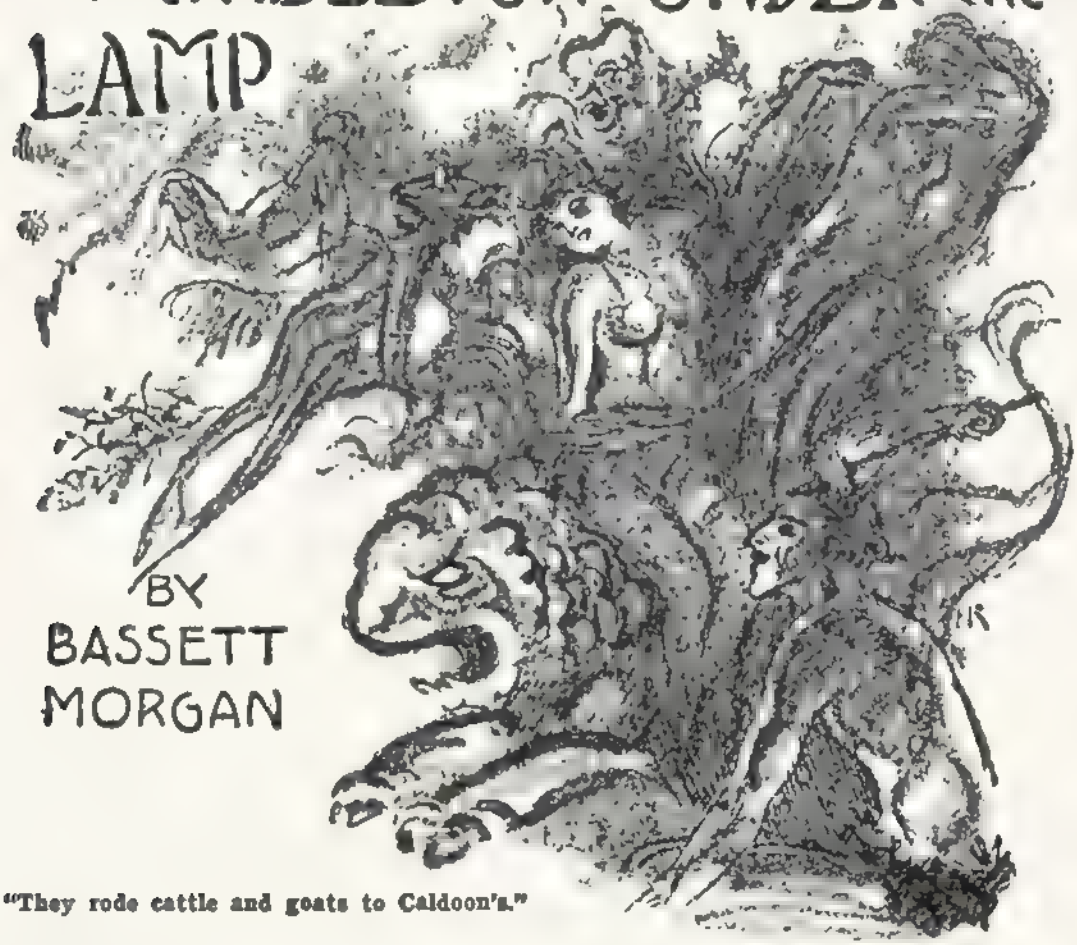
"Well, I'll be ———!" muttered the professor in great perplexity. "Wind—down here! Wind! Will wonders never cease?"

As he spoke, there commenced a tremendous fluttering. Leaves of the woolly substance were caught up and

(Continued on page 714)

The SKELETON UNDER the LAMP

BY BASSETT MORGAN



"They rode cattle and goats to Caldoon's."

WHEN they let us out of prison and the gates clanged shut I looked at the black face of my companion, Hiram Hawse, and saw that he was also afraid. For it was winter, the bleak, raw, rasping cold of an Ohio winter, and both of us knew it would be hard to get a hand-out, shelter, or job. The prison stamp was still raw on us. The lock-step still weighted our leg muscles. The shame of it still brooded in our eyes.

"Whah'd we go f'om heah?" asked Hiram. He had all the irrepressible childish joy of negro spirits. I suspect he was not less innocent of the thing they fastened on him than I was. But that doesn't matter. We had been caught and branded. We were afraid of the cold weather, the cold shoulder of the world. I knew only one place I could go, only one man to whom I could turn: Caldoon. I didn't want to go to him. I remembered some hell-gleam of his eyes on the day they took me out of the courtroom and he halted them a minute to take my hand. I remembered the touch of his long, thin fingers, clammy cold as a snake's scales, and his words: "When you are free, come to me, Stearch. I can always find a job for a man who needs a friend."

He had the reputation of helping

men who had "done time," and I knew of a good many who worked in the grounds of his big estate, but I never heard that they went straight afterward or came to any good end.

The place itself was gloomy and forbidding. As a kid I had clung with both hands to the wrought-iron fence and stared in at evergreen trees clipped in weird shapes—animals, men and devils. On each side of the front steps were two wooden lions with red electric bulbs for eyes, and in a rounded corner wing there was a red shaded lamp under which Caldoon sat when the lights were on. He looked like a skeleton, thin, cadaverous, gaunt, and through the parchment-brown skin the bones seemed to shine red.

It was dusk when we reached the Caldoon place, the ghostly white dusk of winter over farmlands where snow-topped barns and strawstacks and white-tufted trees stand like sentinels on guard. But they were easier to face than the creaking iron gate, the long snow-piled avenue of evergreens cut into grotesque shapes which led to Caldoon's door. And half-way down, we saw the front door open and a girl run out and keep running. As she passed us, I heard her quick labored breathing and thought I caught the sound of a sob.

Caldoon opened his own door. I remembered he always had trouble keeping servants because the place was lonely and out of the way and had a bad reputation generally.

Caldoon was not a bit changed. I noticed again the look of red bones shining through the tightly drawn brown skin of his face under a shock of thick gray hair. He wore a long dark robelike garment covered by cabalistic designs, and he led the way to the round wing. A fire burned in an open hearth and the shaded lamp was lighted. When he sat in the big chair under it, I recalled again my childish phrase for him, "The skeleton under the lamp."

Caldoon was supposed to be an artist, a painter, and his own canvases hung on the walls—dark, gloomy brown, black and green things with a spidery outlining of red in all of them, and when you first looked they had no form or meaning, but after a while you could make out Things dancing in a dark mass, or streaking along as if pursued.

I wasn't long telling him Hiram and I wanted work and shelter, and strangely enough he remembered me; said he had an idea I would come to him and it was all right. There was work for a dozen men.

We went to the kitchen and cooked our own meal and found a pantry stocked with everything you could think of—choice canned and bottled delicacies, fresh chops, an uncooked joint of lamb. Hiram laughed happily and decided if Caldoon was willing he'd turn cook.

We were eating a meal at the kitchen table when Caldoon strolled in with his long robe cluttering his long legs.

"You've done well," he said, looking at our plates, "but you will do well to stay with me. Just now I've had another setback; the young man I hired as stenographer is sick and tonight his sweetheart came to inform me that he would not be able to come. I am dictating notes which are invaluable. I can not be interrupted, but I think I have persuaded her to take his place until he is well. She was reluctant, but now that we have company in the place and can set up a good meal, perhaps she won't mind. You saw her leaving?"

"We-all shuh did," said Hiram, but I kicked his shin under the table for fear he'd say too much about the way that girl scooted down the walk.

"Where did you learn to cook?" came Caldoon's question as he looked at Hiram, and Hiram's jaw fell.

"Buffalo, on a boat," he said; "but Boss, how'd you know Ah cu'd cook?" The bacon and eggs on our plates were hardly enough to rate Hiram as a cook; besides, I had done my own.

"Of course I knew, just as I know neither of you would have come to me if there'd been anyone else to help you."

He showed us to rooms upstairs in the left wing, and Hiram's eyes were rolling. Neither of us had known that sort of luxury, the old-fashioned, black walnut furniture, marble-topped, the deep feather beds, the thick carpets and window-hangings. It was an old house and had once belonged to a wealthy family who sold it to Caldoon and went east. An antique collector would have had a fit of joy over those old things, but they were gloomy.

NEXT morning I was told to shovel the paths, and Hiram started in at breakfast. I saw a girl come in at the gate, and I spoke to her as I stepped aside for her to pass, but a minute later I wished I hadn't, for she stared, then recognized me and said my name.

"Jerry Stearch, isn't it? Oh, are you working here? I'm glad. I hate the place but I've taken a job for a week or two."

There wasn't a word about where I'd been or a sign that it made a difference to her, and yet she knew all about it. We'd gone to the same school as kids. Mamie Bunning was the nicest, whitest, sweetest kind of a girl, blue-eyed and cute, with freckles like a sprinkle of gold on her nose and a red cap on her bobbed curls. But even then I wished she wasn't working for Caldoon.

"You remember Dick Mason?" she asked me, and I nodded. "Well, Dick and I are engaged," and here she blushed as only a young sweet kid in love can blush. "And Dick was secretary for Mr. Caldoon. So when he took sick day before yesterday I came to tell Mr. Caldoon, and he coaxed me to take Dick's place. But don't tell Dick when he meets you. He isn't so very sick and he'll be out soon."

It was an easy promise to make, and, I thought, easy to keep, but I broke it. In one day I saw trouble ahead. I was sweeping up the hearths, for there was an open fire in every room, and piling on coal, and came to the round wing where Mamie Bunning sat at a table taking down notes. Caldoon was in his chair under the lamp, although it was daytime, but dark because of the trees. And Mamie looked right through me, which was all right. I didn't blame her for not boasting of my acquaintance after what I'd got.

But when I jiggled the coal and Caldoon stopped dictating, Mamie looked at him with eyes like a shot deer and said in a voice that sounded hollow and queer: "Yes, Master." It was too darn meek for Mamie.

"Stearch," Caldoon says to me, "go and tell the girl's mother she will stay to dinner and work late. You know where she lives."

"Is that all right with you, Mamie?" I blurted out, and again she said in that funny soft voice, "Yes, Master."

Mamie lived in a little house about two miles away, and her mother was a widow. I went at a brisk trot down the country road to the edge of the town, knocked at Mamie's door and gave her mother the message. And the old lady was flustered.

"Oh, I wish she wouldn't stay," she said. "I don't like her working for him at all, and neither would Dick if he knew."

"Well," I said, "I'll see that she gets home all right, Ma'am. Don't you worry a bit about that."

I made time getting back to Caldoon because a big touring-car picked me us and gave me a ride to the side-road. And I was coming by

a short cut toward the side garden when I saw something that halted me in my tracks. Mamie Bunning was sort of lying in the arms of Caldoon and he was pressing his lips to her mouth. It wasn't any mutual love affair, for she lay limp as a rag, one hand hanging straight down, and her head fallen back. I didn't know what to do, and you remember I was a coward or I wouldn't have gone to Caldoon in the first place. Instead of slamming through the window and getting her home, I went into the kitchen, where I saw Hiram scuttling around in a big white apron, going through all the motions of cooking a swell dinner. But what flabbergasted me was the fact that not even the gas was lighted, or a sign of food in sight, yet Hiram greeted me with: "Looka dat tu'key, boy! Dat mak' you mouf watah?"

He opened the cold oven door and showed me a black emptiness.

"Say, are you drunk or just plain nuts?" I asked him. Then the door opened and I whirled around to face Caldoon, and in a minute I knew it was me that was crazy, for I smelled turkey and heard it sizzle as Hiram basted it, and there was potatoes boiling, and squash, and coffee, and pumpkin pie. Well, all I could do was go upstairs and wash and wonder what ailed my brain. When I came down they were at the table, Mamie laughing away as Hiram served the meal and Caldoon looking fresher and less like a hant than before. And maybe I didn't punish that turkey and pie! But the funny thing was that when I was taking Mamie home I said something about Caldoon kissing her. I butted in, of course, and she flattened me just like I deserved. She was so mad she ran the last quarter-mile alone and refused to speak to me again. She said I lied.

Thinking over that first sight of the kitchen, I thought I had.

The next night we had visitors. Hiram was cooking all day, and in the round room Mamie was whacking a typewriter. I cleaned the walks, and for lack of something else started on the barn. It had not been used, probably in years, and the cobwebs hung thick. The dust was smothering, but I opened it and let the wind blow through, and among old harness and farm implements rusted to pieces I found a big scales. When I left the gray house I weighed one hundred and thirty-four pounds. On that scales I had lost the four, but I figured it was old and unreliable. Still, it stuck in my mind.

That night I was opening the door to people who drove up in carriages such as I hadn't seen since I was a kid. I wondered where all the old-fashioned things had been resting, and who kept the stables. But those horses were good stock, and I know horses, sleek matched blacks and whites, well-kept and fed. I enjoyed turning them into the stalls all right and wished we had feed, for the night was clear and cold, a sort of glittering blue and silver and diamond gleams on the snow.

After a while I went into the kitchen and found Hiram stewing oysters and fixing all kinds of eatables, and I lunched then and there; then I wandered down the hall thinking I'd fix the fires and get a look at the company. I wished to God I hadn't. It was some party, and I'd seen a few and heard of others. I never saw such women, white-skinned as milk, beautiful as marble statues, with something of the same dead white look of their bodies, and without any more covering than a scarf of filmy silky stuff that blew as they danced and trailed like snakes of different colors through the air. And the men were no different except for lengths of fur around their hips—young, handsome men, with longish hair like a crown of horns around their heads. And what hurt me was

Mamie Bunning sitting on the arm of Caldoon's chair, watching that devil-dance. For it was wicked. I'm no preacher, but that was raw.

Mamie was all eyes, watching, and her eyes were dreamy at that. And something Caldoon whispered to her made her reach up a hand and pat his cheek and lift her young mouth to his. Then, as if the fire died down and the spooky shadows crept from the room corners, the dancing women looked like witches, and their scarfs were gray and their long flying hair was dark and ragged, and they crouched low and flew in a wild circle with the men lashing them with whips of blue light. And those men were devils out and out then, just like the picture of old Satan they showed a kid at Sunday school.

I rubbed my eyes. Then I decided it was a sort of movie show churned out without a screen to catch the pictures, because I could see through the men and women to the farther wall. But Mamie Bunning in the arms of Caldoon was no camera business. That was real, so real that when he let her go and she saw the witches and devils she screamed.

In a second they were men and women again, handsome and lovely, dancing together, and it was then I began to wonder where the music came from, a sort of bell chime floating in through the open windows as the curtains blew out, and another rattling sound like nigger minstrels' bones, and another throb-throb-throb, like your own pulses when you're frightened.

It was terrible, yet it was pretty to watch. I couldn't move, but when I looked at Caldoon I was paralyzed. If he'd shot at me I couldn't have dodged. That was why I stayed rooted to the hall floor when Mamie Bunning stood on her feet and shed her dress and the rest, and started to join that dance, the prettiest thing in the room. She was laughing and shaking her bobbed curls, and when the men devils caught her up she squealed happily like a kid. Even when the women stepped outside the circle and those big devil-men tossed Mamie like a doll from one to the other, she laughed.

And when they flung her finally into Caldoon's arms, she curled up like a kitten, and threw her white hands to the back of his head and held his mouth to hers. I know now that he had forgotten me standing there and watching, for I could suddenly move. I tried to dash into the room, but something prevented; a wall I couldn't see barred me out, and I beat my fists on it till they hurt, then yanked open the door and raced to the stable to get a horse. I intended to ride hell-bent for leather to town and tell Dick Mason it was time he took Mamie out of that.

But when I reached the stable, the old door creaked in a rising wind and the whole place was empty. I rubbed my eyes and went into every stall. There wasn't a horse in sight, yet I had put them there myself. There wasn't a carriage on the road, either, and like a lunatic I dashed to the porch and stared in at the window.

The dying fire flickered in red spurts. The room was empty except for Caldoon in his chair and Mamie Bunning's white body cradled in his arms. Then I dashed through to the kitchen.

Hiram was stirring empty pots on the cold range and tasting air, and I realized suddenly that I was weak with hunger, starving, famished as I'd never been in my life. I couldn't make it out. But when I staggered down the hall, Mamie was dressed even to her hat and cloak, and Caldoon told me to take her home. Evidently she had forgotten she was angry at me, for she took my arm, and before we got to town I was half carrying her. The kid was exhausted, a wreck. And what her mother said to me was plenty and I took it

without a word till she finished, then I asked:

"Where can I see Dick Mason?"

"The next street, the fourth block down, a brown house on the left side," she told me. And I went.

I got there in the grayest hour of day or night just before dawn, and I had some time making them let me in to Dick. He was sleepy and grumbling, and I didn't dare tell him what I'd seen for fear he wouldn't believe me.

"I've just taken Mamie Bunning home from Caldoon's," I said. "That old devil is working the kid to death, and if she was my girl I'd marry her this very hour and keep her out of his clutches. It's twenty minutes to 6 o'clock, and I can get a preacher here in jig-time. How about it?"

Well, he told me it was none of my business, with variations, and I had to go away knowing he wanted to call the cops. But I didn't go to Caldoon's. I went down the street and woke a doctor and told him my troubles, and he felt my pulse and looked at my tongue and asked how long it had been since I had eaten.

"Couple of hours, and I've been living high at Caldoon's right along," I answered.

"And you saw devils and Mamie Bunning?"

"Yes, and she's home now showing the wear and tear," I said.

"I'm having breakfast right away," he told me, "and you're staying here until you've put away a meal. Then I'll see Mamie."

Well, I had porridge and toast, eggs, bacon, jam, more toast and coffee, and the doctor laughed at the amount I got outside of.

I walked on the wind going back. It was a cold morning, but I was warm, and when I sneaked a look at Hiram in bed I got a fright. He had been a nice glossy chubby black, but he looked gray and lean and his mouth was open as if he gasped for air. I toddled on to bed and slept late. And when I woke I still lay there thinking, and decided that Caldoon had me in his power, and I'd been seeing things in a sort of hypnotic state. But when I went to town that day with a list of things to buy for Caldoon, I heard that Dick Mason had married Mamie Bunning all right, and they were going away as soon as he was able to travel.

I shopped at a hardware store, for it was only a little town, and they rolled up a bundle of paint-tubes and brushes such as artists use. That seemed promising. Caldoon was going back to his painting instead of dictating to Mamie Bunning, and perhaps we'd have peace. I took considerable joy in telling him she was married, but the joy died when I saw his eyes. If ever hell shone in a man's optics it did in the eyes of Caldoon. Then he laughed, and it sounded like a shovel dragged over rocks—a harsh, grating sound.

Hiram and I ate a prime dinner in the kitchen that night, for Caldoon gave orders not to disturb him, and we were willing. I told Hiram I thought he looked seedy that morning in bed but he said he felt fine, and he certainly looked it. And for days nothing happened.

Then one morning Hiram didn't show up, and when I went to see what was wrong he fell out of bed and couldn't get on his feet. I tried to heave him into bed and couldn't, so I tapped at Caldoon's door.

There was no answer, and finally I turned the knob. The room was empty, so I went downstairs and found him in the round wing with a painter's palette caught over his thumb and painting a picture on the oak panel over the fireplace. He was standing on a short ladder, and the fire-glow shone red under his chin and nostrils and brows. If ever I saw the Prince of Darkness it was Caldoon that morning, but I told him

about Hiram's being sick; then I wished I hadn't.

"I'll go up and see him," he said, and came down from the ladder. He didn't come down step by step as any other man would; he seemed to swoop down without taking the steps, and I felt shivery and queer about it, for he went upstairs the same way—sort of glided up. I heard the door of Hiram's room close and then a funny thing happened. The fire I had been staring at, and which had lighted Caldoon's face, was black out. There was only the yawning gloomy hole of the hearth, but the picture Caldoon was painting shone as if it was lighted from behind, and I saw that Caldoon had been painting his own head. And such a head! Dark, almost black against a scarlet background that made a streak of fire around the features and shone through the hair and melted into deeper blackness.

And the room felt bitterly cold. I decided I'd better see that friendly doctor and tell him about Hiram, and streaked for town.

I was sweating when I reached the house of Dr. Benton, and his wife said he was visiting patients, but if I'd come in and wait I could see him presently. She was a stout, motherly sort of woman with her sleeves rolled up and flour on her hands, and I smelled baking that almost sent me crazy with hunger, so I went in.

"Come to the kitchen," she told me. "I'd like to talk to you."

There was a plate of fried cakes on one end of the table and more sizzling in a pot on the stove, and she handed the plate within reach and poured me a cup of coffee that was evidently waiting for the doctor. I cleaned the plate of fried cakes, and then I apologized.

"Jerry Stearch," she said, "why do you stay at Caldoon's?"

Well, I explained about having done time and how hard it was to get a job.

"I realize that," she said, "and a good many other unfortunate men and boys have worked for him, and almost starved to death. Does he feed you at all?"

"Starved, Ma'am?" I came back. "Why, we live on the fat of the land, even if I did make a pig of myself over your cakes."

"Where does he buy his groceries and meat, then?" she asked.

It started me thinking that I'd never known a grocer's wagon call, or seen stuff unloaded at the kitchen, which was queer. But I didn't want to admit it to Mrs. Benton.

"How is Dick Mason?" I asked. "I hear he married Mamie."

"Dick Mason stayed two weeks with Caldoon and fainted on the street. Doctor has been feeding him for malnutrition. Yes, he and Mamie are married, thank God, and they leave today on a wedding trip. He got a job in Detroit and I hope he doesn't come back till Caldoon is dead. Did you hear about the latest talk of the Camwell stables? You know he breeds horses. Well, one morning he found every horse on his place in a lather as if they'd been ridden all night at a terrible pace. He's wild about it and trying to find out who let them out and ran them to a frenzy. And the funny thing is that they were scratched and cut as if with spurs and whip. And people are reviving that old story of hobgoblins, which is silly."

My scalp started to prickle because I remembered Caldoon's party, and if the sheriff traced it to Caldoon's house, I'd likely be in trouble again and so would Hiram; so I decided to go back and tell him it might be best for us to leave Caldoon's while the going was good. Mrs. Benton gave me a bag of fried cakes and some other parcels that she insisted I take along, and said she'd send the doctor, and I went back thinking of everything that had happened and found Hiram in bed apparently dead

to the world and Caldoon with his mouth pressed to Hiram's lips. He couldn't have heard me coming, for he was mad in a minute when I spoke. Then he controlled his rage like a shot.

"Have you ever heard of reviving a fainting person by breathing for them?" he snarled.

I hadn't, but I remembered Mamie Bunning and how he pressed his mouth to hers, and my flesh began to creep.

I went downstairs myself and heated water, thinking I'd make coffee for Hiram, but when I looked for it there wasn't any. There wasn't tea or milk or food of any sort in that pantry, not a crumb, but I got some hot water and carried it upstairs, soaked a fried cake and forced it down Hiram's throat. I fed him most of them and he began to show signs of life and presently began to feed himself, and snatch at the cakes, stuffing his mouth as if he hadn't seen food in months, and I saw then that he was just skin and bone.

By that time I decided I had lost my mind, but I let the doctor in when he came. Caldoon didn't appear. He was painting like mad at his infernal portrait of himself. Dr. Benton didn't say much, but between us we bundled Hiram into his Ford and they left me alone at Caldoon's.

PROBABLY I was light-headed with the effect of everything, for I don't remember much of that day. Caldoon was in the hall when I opened the door, and he looked at me and laughed.

"We shall have company tonight," he said. "Better see about refreshments." And like a lamb I went to the pantry.

By Golly, I'd been dreaming all its emptiness, for there was everything you could think of and I started in as if I knew how to cook real food.

At dark I opened the door to the party. I don't know why I didn't think it queer to see naked men and women riding cattle and goats to Caldoon's door, but it seemed all right to me then. And the same crowd went through the same dances. The same strange music of rattling bones and bells and throbbing drums kept up for a long time; then it changed to the sound of a bell tolling as if for a funeral, and the company formed a half-circle with Caldoon in the center, and he had shed his robe. I saw the red outline of every bone in his body, like a skeleton of red bones covered by brown skin that was half transparent. There was a sort of altar that must have been the table, and when Caldoon looked at me and said something I didn't seem to resist a bit as the white women closed in on me; and the next thing I knew I was stretched on that altar, naked as any of them.

I've heard of a Black Mass. I've heard that some dives in big cities put it on for sightseers. But I've been through it and I'm not afraid of hell after death any more. What happened isn't printable. I guess I went crazy, but when I got a little sense I was lying on the floor and my clothes were tossed around the hall as if I'd been pitched out there and everything thrown at me. And my body was one big bruise and ached all over. Well, I got into my socks and trousers, and went to the round wing. It was empty and cold, but the portrait of Caldoon over the fireplace was finished. I went into the library, and it also was cold, but there was another head of that fiend from hell, Caldoon, painted on the wall. I went into every room in the house and found the same painting on a wall panel, until I came to one of the bedrooms, and that door was locked; and when I tapped, I heard Caldoon laugh and the flip-flip of his paint-brush working like mad.

I decided I had enough. I was sagging on my feet and the skin of my hands looked puckered as if they'd been soaked in water a long time. Somehow I got out of the house and down the lane of trees, and looking back I saw the morning sun lighting the red glass eyes of the carved lions on the steps, and they seemed to be leaping at me. Of course I was crazy, but I ran, fell down and got up and ran till I fell again and lay still.

Somebody driving by in a farm wagon picked me up and took me to the little hospital in town. And I was there for months, with Dr. Benton calling every day for awhile. I told him what had happened, but he didn't say much. Then one day when I was beginning to worry about the hospital expense and doctor bill and told him so, he said he had a job for me. He had patched Hiram up and got him a job, but mine was in Cleveland.

I took another name and I held that job in a garage on the outskirts of Cleveland for about three years. I paid off the hospital bill and Dr. Benton and saved a little money. I was going straight, and life began to look rosy, when a notion took me to go back and see Dr. Benton and the old Caldoon place. For I decided I had lost my grip after the pen and been nutty enough to imagine all that happened.

It was a good thing I went, even though I am sitting here in a jail cell wondering what the outcome will be.

MRS. BENTON didn't know me when she opened the door to my ring at the bell, but once she recalled me, she took me in. It was one of those warm Indian summer days with red and yellow leaves in the streets, and a sort of golden haze over the farm country, and Mrs. Benton was making pickles and catsup. The house smelled spicy and tempting, and I went to the kitchen and watched her pouring wax over jar tops and sticking on labels. She was glad, honestly glad I'd got along, but naturally she thought of the Caldoon place when she saw me.

"He's dead," she said. My heart sort of leaped, then stopped, for her face looked funny, sort of drawn and queer.

"He had been dead a long time when they found him. And he left a will giving the house and land to Dick Mason and Mamie."

"My God!" I said. "What made him that generous?"

"Nobody knows. It was a nine days' wonder in town. But of course we were glad for them to have it. The land is valuable and there isn't such fine furniture anywhere. But I don't like it, Jerry. Doctor and I tried to persuade Dick and Mamie to sell the stuff and pull down the house, but she knows the value of the place and she persuaded Dick to move in. Of course Dick couldn't afford to keep it up. It needs servants to keep that big place in order. Dick is bookkeeper for the Firebrick Company, but his salary couldn't begin to be enough, so he's doing auditing nights, driving all over the country and working himself to skin and bone. And that leaves Mamie alone in the house except for a maid or two, and she never keeps a servant more than a week. She runs an ad all the time for servants."

"They haven't any babies?" I asked, and she shook her head.

"I feel like going out to see Mamie," I said. "She was a nice kid, not a bit snifty or anything."

"You'll find her changed," said Mrs. Benton. "She has grown proud or something, hardly speaks to any of us in town, and gives parties all the time when Dick is away. The old place is ablaze with lights. You know it's up that side road and not many people pass because the road is so bad, muddy in spring and

fall, rutted in summer, deep in snow in winter, but once in a while Doctor and I drive up. We liked Mamie, and we knew her from a baby."

I sat for quite a while without saying anything. All the old horror swooped back, real as hell.

"Did they ever find out who rode Camwell's horses that time?" I asked.

"No, and Camwell quit his farm. He is selling automobiles now. There are very few horses left around here, very little stock of any kind. Our milk comes in by train. It seems that some plague made keeping cattle or horses or goats unprofitable."

Cattle, horses, goats. And I recalled the Caldoon parties when his guests had come to the last one riding cattle and goats.

"Do you suppose I could get a job with Mamie?" I asked.

Mrs. Benton spilled a ladle of catsup she was pouring in a bottle and turned on me like a shot.

"Didn't you have enough of Caldoon's?" she snapped. "Have some sense, Jerry Stearch. You stay away from there."

But I couldn't. Something, perhaps the thought of Mamie, took me out there.

It wasn't much changed. Vines turned red by frost covered the walls. The trees were still clipped like animals and men and devils, and I went to the back door, and a stout, stupid, fat woman opened it. Sure, I could have a job; have her job if I'd take it. She was leaving. Could I cook?

Well, I could cook potatoes and fry meat and make coffee. Any man can do that much, and I took the job. The fat woman departed inside of an hour, and pretty soon Mamie came to the kitchen and saw me rigged up in an apron and white coat I'd found in the room the fat woman showed me. I told her my name was Johnson, and it went over. Mamie didn't know me. I doubt if she'd have cared anyway, for that girl was so thin you could almost see through her. Her bobbed curls looked too heavy for her tiny neck to carry. Her freckles were gone and her eyes looked weird, they were so big for her face. She was powdered and rouged and perfumed, and she had on a sort of pink negligee that wasn't securely fastened, and she didn't seem to care.

She sat on a corner of the kitchen table smoking one cigarette after another, too friendly with the hired help, in my opinion.

"I suppose you dance?" she asked me. I said I did.

"I have such a time keeping servants in this lonely place that I usually make company of them. If you like to join in, we're having a jinx tonight."

"I haven't company clothes," I said.

"You won't need them," she came back, and laughed sort of queerly. "I'm going to lie down now. I don't sleep well nights. Just get dinner for me and yourself. My husband won't be home."

THERE was no mistake about the pantry being supplied this time, and I peeled some spuds and with the aid of a cook-book mixed a custard. The house was quiet and I thought I'd look it over. It wasn't changed, only the old furniture was polished and there were signs of housekeeping and order. But in every room, painted on the wall panels, was the head of Caldoon.

It got under my skin and started chills down my spine, that dark devilish face in what they call three-quarter style, outlined with lurid red that thickened to black. I could see Caldoon grin at me. Bedrooms, hall, library, living-rooms, all had it. One door upstairs was closed, and I surmised that was Mamie's room, so I took the chance to go to the round wing.

Sure enough, over the fireplace, Caldoon looked down as a fiend might look from hell. My skin puckered and my scalp prickled, and I could feel him in the room. I whirled around and started to back toward the door. For there under the lamp which was lighted was Caldoon in his chair, and Mamie lay in his arms.

Then something told me what was happening. Caldoon had painted his likenesses in every room so that she was never away from his eyes. He wasn't any more dead than he'd ever been. He never would die until he was starved out. He had lived on the breath of fools who came there to work for him—me and Hiram and Mamie Bunning. And when we were through and nobody else came, he left his portraits to hypnotize Mamie, so that she recalled him from the hell-pit that yawned to let him out whenever red blood willed it.

And Mamie was in his power, hypnotized by those pictures. I saw a play of Trilby once, and remembered how the sight of Svengali's picture threw her back into a hypnotized state. The same thing was happening to Mamie Bunning, or rather Mamie Mason. Dick was away nights and days, and the old house reeked of hell-fiends that had their orgies there.

All the time I was thinking, I was staring at the Skeleton under the Lamp with Mamie in his arms, drinking her breath; for she lay limp, one arm hanging, her head fallen back.

And I was such a coward that I let her lie. I wanted to leap and snatch her away, but something in the transparent look of Caldoon told me he was a shade, a ghost, a hant. And I knew how he'd kept Hiram and me hypnotized, thinking we were living high when we didn't taste a bite of food for days, weeks, starving to death and that fiend-shape living on the breath of life from our bodies, as he was living now on Mamie.

I backed away to the kitchen, and tried to cook. I set the table for two. I scorched the chops, and the custard was watery, but anyway I called her to eat. She came in the same negligee and seemed too tired to care about anything, but she ate like a wolf and her dull eyes brightened. When she finished she acted more like the girl I'd known as she went upstairs.

I felt like streaking for Dr. Benton and sending a hurry call for Dick Mason. But I hated to leave her alone in the house, so I stuck. I washed up and tidied the kitchen, then I went upstairs to brush and doll up a little, for I had decided to be in at that dance in the evening.

DARK comes early in the fall, and it was nearly November. I made up the fires in the downstairs rooms and came to the round wing. I didn't need to bother there. In the hearth a fire blazed, and such a fire, green and blue streaming flames that gave a graveyard light on the portrait of Caldoon above. And sitting in the chair under the lamp, in his long dark robe, was that fiend.

"Well, Stearch," he said in the same cavernous and hollow voice, "you've come back. A good night to be here. A merry night."

You might call it merry. I remember the company arriving. I saw them riding the demon trees in the grounds, riding the carved lions, riding the wind. I saw the dance of white women with their pale silver shining hair turn gray, and their white bodies grow glistening brown as they aged before my eyes. I saw the men in wolf-skins lash them with whips of blue lightning, and Mamie joined in that circle. They tossed her from one to the other, and I was among that crowd of fiends trying to catch her, yelling like they did, as much a fiend as any but without

their strength or skill. For always she was snatched from my grasp, and in the end when her laughter died to sobs she was tossed to the Skeleton under the Lamp, and the Black Mass began. There was the dark altar and Mamie, slender, white, pitiful. . . .

And again at dawn I woke, this time in front of the fireplace, and I saw Mamie in the chair under the lamp, alone.

The windows were wide open; a wind mourned through the trees and blew cold on my flesh. There was the smell of brimstone lingering somewhere, and I think it affected me. For I was sane enough then. I went to the kitchen and found a can of kerosene. I trailed it from the spout all over those rugs and up the stairs. I found gasoline in the barn, for the Masons had a car, and I emptied that. I piled old papers and dry brush and leaves in every room. Then I wrapped Mamie in a blanket. She was limp as a rag and her flesh was purple-blotched, her lips paper white. She hadn't fainted exactly, but she was lifeless to all appearances, and I couldn't waken her.

I touched a match, closed some windows so there was a flue of air through the house, and picking Mamie up I carried her over my shoulder down the path of demon trees and down the road until we reached the paved highway. There were dozens of cars passing by, and finally I got one to stop and pick us up.

By that time the fire at Caldoon's had made considerable headway and there was smoke showing, and the smell of it. The man whose car we rode in sniffed and said something about fire, and I guess I blundered.

"You're darn right there's a fire. I made a job this time. It's the old Caldoon place——"

But he stopped the car.

"Get out," he said. "I'll take Mrs. Mason to town, but you don't ride with me. I know you now, you jail-bird. You'll be lucky if you're not lynched."

And I was a coward and went.

They got me that night. I didn't try to hide. I went back and watched the Caldoon place burn, and I'm telling you those devils danced in the fire, danced as the trees caught, danced in a cloud of luridly red smoke streaking across the sky, and when the town fire apparatus got out there, there was no hope of saving stick or stone of the place.

Incendiarism is the charge they'll soak me for, unless Dr. Benton can do something. I've been in three months, but the doctor and his wife come every day. They tell me Mamie is recovering. She had a terrible nervous breakdown, almost lost her mind for good, but she and Dick have a little house in town and he has his job daytimes and is looking after her nights. I figure it will come out all right, because she doesn't remember anything that happened in the house of Caldoon, and even if they read this, nobody's going to tell her. And Dr. Benton assures me that fire wipes out everything. He's offered to take me into his own house, if they let me off, and he put up a great plea for me about needing nursing rather than punishment and thought the story of Caldoon's house would prove it. Here's hoping.

The HAND of the INVISIBLE

"It seemed to draw the very breath from his body."

"WHAT are you doing here so far from civilization?" I asked Allyn Capron, as, having taken off my rain-soaked hunting-jacket, I sat down in one of the chairs of the little cabin and glanced curiously about me. "Is this your shooting-lodge?"

"No. It is my permanent home," he replied in a strange, sad voice.

"In such a lonely and solitary place as this! Oh, I see. Love in a cottage, eh? But I never thought that the girl who married Al Capron would want to live in such——"

"Be quiet, for heaven's sake! You do not know *who* hears us!" he exclaimed, as terror came over his face. As he spoke, he jerked his right hand away from the back of a Morris chair, upon which it had been resting, with a sudden motion that was unaccountable. It was as if a hot iron, or *something unseen*, had touched it.

"Oh, come, Capron! Not to talk about love affairs with such a sheik as you is absurd. You must have changed your habits and ideas a whole lot, then, since I saw you last."

"Yes, I *have* changed them," he replied gravely. "You will probably come to think me insane, too. Yet I am not, although I have undergone that which would make almost anyone

lose his reason. You shall hear, if I can tell them without interruption, the reasons why, for all these miserable twenty-eight years, I have buried myself in this mountain solitude, with the deer, the fox, and the wildcat as my only neighbors, where the forest overhangs the lake, and I shall never see a woman again."

I had been with a party of friends deer-shooting in the region about Big Moose Lake in the heart of the Adirondack Mountains. Becoming separated from them, in the midst of one of those driving rain-storms that are peculiar to the north woods in late autumn, I had wandered about for some time, completely lost, far from any camp, hotel, homestead, or village, and with impenetrable woods of pine and fir all about me, made all the darker by the gloom of the coming night.

When about ready to give up in despair I came across a small, partly overgrown trail. As I trudged along it in face of the blinding rain, the forest became more open, and I emerged into a little clearing in the center of which stood a log cabin. The door was unfastened, and, knowing how hospitable the Adirondack natives are, I entered a room that was tenantless.

I had hardly time to notice that the room was sparsely furnished—a Morris chair, with a deerskin spread over it, being the only luxury—when the man whom I had not seen for twenty-eight years or so and whom I had given up as dead, entered.

"Capron, old man," I continued after expressing my surprize at finding this once popular officer of the Rough Riders and friend of Colonel Theodore Roosevelt living alone in such an out-of-the-way place, "I am indeed glad to meet you again after all of these years. I had given you up as dead long ago."

"Yes," he replied with a faint smile, running his hand through his thin white hair, which I remembered was once brown and plentiful, "you call me old and have thought me dead. Old I am, far beyond my years; there are times when I do not know whether I am living or dead. It is twenty-eight years since you and I were classmates at the university; twenty-eight years since I was wounded at San Juan Hill, and it seems like as many ages. But I promised to tell you why I was living here."

As Capron finished speaking he removed his hand from the little table before which he had been seated, in that peculiar twisting motion that had attracted my attention before. As I gazed at him I saw a sudden startled look come into his blue eyes, as if caused by fright or pain, or both.

After a moment he continued, "You will remember that I was to have married Edith Endicott in the early summer of 1898 after I was graduated. But the battleship *Maine* was blown up in Havana harbor in February of that year, and war was declared against Spain two months later. The war fever caught me, just as it caught you.

"It was useless for Edith to plead or argue against it. My mind was made up. So, when the Rough Riders were recruited, I easily obtained a commission, as I had, before entering college, attended a military school and my father was a friend of Colonel Roosevelt.

"There is no need for me to say anything about the engagements of the campaign—Guantanamo, Los Guisimas and El Caney—in which the Rough Riders did their part. I will only mention what happened to me at the battle of San Juan Hill.

"The Rough Riders, detached as infantry, were ordered to advance from El Caney toward San Juan on the Spaniard's rear. The center was to be attacked and pierced on the following day, and the row of

blockhouses on the heights behind the town were to be taken by storm. All of this was brilliantly accomplished.

"Just before the opening of the battle, however, I received instructions to extend my company in skirmishing order through the jungles that reached nearly to the outskirts of the town.

"As we worked our way through the tangled growths, one of our Cuban guides informed me of a strong Spanish outpost on a near-by hill. This I determined to capture. Within rifle shot of the position was a knoll upon whose summit stood an old, ruined Spanish monastery with a secluded graveyard. I saw the advantage of posting my men there and gave the command for a rapid advance.

"We shortly came upon an old trail, or little used roadway, along which was passing the funeral of a Cuban lady of quality. I ordered my men aside to make way for the open catafalque, upon which lay the coffin covered with flowers. A little procession of household servants, carrying wreaths to place upon the grave, as is the custom in Cuba, were walking behind it. I told these people to hurry as much as possible, as the Spaniards were likely to open fire at any moment.

"In the long, clear southern twilight of that June night we skirmished with the enemy for several hours. Just as we had finally succeeded in driving the Spaniards off the knoll in some disorder, but with no casualties to ourselves, a bullet whistled through an opening of the monastery's crumbling wall and struck me a glancing blow on the head. Bright stars flashed around me. I stumbled forward and fell. The cracking of rifle volley firing died away. Then came blackness.

"You can imagine my surprize, when I finally regained consciousness, to find myself lying on a soft couch in a handsome but somewhat old-fashioned room. One side of it was hung with tapestry and the other with rich drapery, such as is common in the Cuban haciendas of the better class.

"A subdued light filled the entire chamber; its source I could not discover. My sword and hat lay upon a buffet. I had evidently been carried from the battlefield, but when and whither?

"Someone was holding my hand. My wonder increased when I saw that it was a woman dressed in white like a bride.

"It is useless for me to try and describe her. She was like the fancy portraits one occasionally sees of beautiful Spanish girls: exquisitely handsome, delicate, and pale. Masses of dark hair curled over a low, broad forehead and shoulders, and her piquant little face peeped forth as from a silken nest.

"As I tried to rise she stopped me with a caressing gesture as a mother would restrain her child. Her bright, beaming eyes smiled down at me. In her entire manner, I noticed, there was much of dignity and self-reliance.

" 'Where am I?' I asked in Spanish.

" 'With me,' she replied naively in the same soft language. 'Is it not enough, *Señor?*'

"I was still confused and dizzy from the shock of my wound. 'A bullet, I think, struck me down in a cemetery near San Juan. Strange!' I murmured.

" 'Why is it strange?'

" 'Well, when I was at college I often walked among the graves in old cemeteries on Sundays and holidays. My fiancee used to object to that. She said I was always dragging her around in such dismal places. But I am a journalist, when not a soldier, and often I get an idea, or an inspiration, from an epitaph on some old tombstone. The greatest piece of

English literature ever written was composed in a country graveyard, you know.'

"'But you found something else besides inspiration in that San Juan cemetery, eh, *Señor?*' She laughed softly. As she did so, it seemed to me that a strange light glittered in her eyes, on her teeth, and over all her lovely face.

"'Yes, *Señorita,*' I replied boldly. 'I *did* find something else, such as—well, love, for example.' You know that, in the old days, I had quite a reputation of being a 'fast worker' where women were concerned. I thought of that then, as I gazed with frank admiration at this beautiful Cuban girl. Suddenly, I can not explain why, I seized her hand.

"'You must not look at me like that, *Señor,*' she said, after a minute of silence, attempting to withdraw her hand. 'You have said that you are engaged to marry.'

"'Yes, that is true. But engagements can be broken as well as made. I really never loved anyone until I saw you.'

"'Oh, that is foolish! You have but just met me.'

"'What is time, *Señorita?* It is nothing when compared to eternity. Yes, I *do* love you. Real love is the kind that is born of a glance and lasts—forever. Such things happen every day.'

"This may sound like melodramatic nonsense to you, but I really did mean every word I said to that girl at that time. My past love affairs seemed as nothing. Perhaps I love her still. Yet——"

He paused for a moment in his strange narrative. Once more there came that startled look into his face, and he twitched his hand away from the table where it was again resting.

"Knowing the Cuban customs," he continued, "I drew a ring from her finger and placed my signet ring in its place.

"'You are a soldier, though, and wounded too,' she said softly. 'What if you should die before we meet again?'

"'But you might die, also,' I replied laughing.

"'Die! I am already dead—in loving you. Living, or dead, however, our souls are as one, and——'

"'Neither heaven nor hell shall separate us now. It is for all eternity!'

"I suppose that my wound and emotions together, combined with the great beauty of the girl, made me speak so dramatically. Lovers are known to be extravagant with their words, anyway, the world over.

"I rose to a sitting position on the couch and put my arms about her. She was warm, palpitating, *living* flesh. Nothing of an unusual nature struck me then. She did not resist. I held her in a close embrace, and our lips met in a long kiss. Oh, that kiss! It was strangely magnetic and thrilling. I have kissed many girls but I never knew the like of that kiss before. It seemed to draw the very breath from my body, at the same time exhilarating me.

"'Allyn! Allyn!' she sighed.

"'What, you know my name? And what is yours?'

"'Mercedes. But ask no more. Remember, though, it is for all eternity, as you say.'

"Slowly, a drowsiness, against which I struggled in vain, came over me. The last I remember is sinking back upon the couch and clasping her firm little hand, as if to save myself from oblivion.

"When I recovered my senses I was alone. The sun was rising, but had not yet risen. The scenery, upon which I gazed with astonishment—some low scrub oak through which we had skirmished—rose dark as the deepest indigo against the pink-tinted eastern sky.

"Moist with dew and blood, I propped myself on one elbow and looked around me in bewildered amazement.

"I was *again* in the cemetery where I had been wounded. A little gray owl was whooping and blinking in the recess of the monastery's crumbling wall. Were the drapery and tapestry of the room but the ivy that rustled upon it? Where the lighted buffet had stood was an old square tomb upon which were my sword and hat.

"The last rays of the waning moon stole through the ruins upon a new-made grave—the fancied couch upon which I lay—strewn with the flowers of yesterday. At its head stood a temporary wooden cross hung with wreaths.

"My signet ring was gone. In its place was a strange one with a square emerald. Where was she who had worn it? What nightmare was this?

"For a time I remained where I was, bewildered by the vividness of my recent dream—for so I believed it to be. But, if it was a dream, how did this strange ring come to be upon my finger? And where was mine?

"Perplexed by these thoughts and filled with regret that the beautiful girl I had seen had no reality, I made my way down the hill toward our lines at El Caney, faint, feverish, and thirsty.

"After a long, tiresome hike over a road that was little better than a jungle path, I saw a large hacienda at which I decided to stop for water. I found that it belonged to a Señor Juan Rodriguez, a wealthy tobacco planter. As he had been a Cuban official under the Weyler regime I expected little courtesy. He treated me kindly, however, had servants attend to my wound, and supply me with wine and food.

"Señor Rodriguez was dressed in deep mourning. Upon my informing him that I was the officer who had halted the line of skirmishers when the funeral passed on the previous day, he thanked me warmly, saying that it was the funeral of his only daughter.

"'Half of my life seems to have gone with her,' he said with tears in his eyes. 'She was so sweet, gentle, and beautiful, Señor Captain! My poor Mercedes!'

"'*Whom* did you say?' I asked in surprize, half rising from the couch upon which I lay. It was the name of the girl I had seen in my dream.

"'Mercedes, my daughter, *Señor,*' he replied without noticing my excitement. 'See, what a child I have lost!'

"The Cuban suddenly drew back a curtain that concealed a full-length portrait. There, before my eyes, dressed in white just as she was in my dream, was the beautiful girl with the masses of black hair, the fine dark eyes, and the piquant smile lighting up her features even on the canvas.

"'My God!' I ejaculated.

"'You know Mercedes, *Señor?*' the planter asked, dropping the curtain in his surprize.

"I held out my hand, showing him the ring. He almost tore it off, so great was his agitation.

"'Mercedes' ring!' he cried in a high-pitched voice. 'It was buried with her yesterday. Her grave has been violated by your infamous soldiers. Were it not for what you did at the time of her funeral I would report this to your superior officer!'

"As I was trying to explain, a hand —*the same little hand of the previous night*—with my signet ring on its third finger, came stealing into mine, unseen. A kiss from tremulous lips that I could not see was pressed on mine. I fell backward on the couch and fainted.

"The ring might have gotten me into serious trouble later had it come to the attention of my superior officers. But Señor Rodriguez kept his word and never reported the incident.

Either he was too much upset at the time, or he feared publicity, being a quiet man and a gentleman; or he felt that his known sympathy for the Spanish cause would gain him little consideration.

"A month later I was on my way back home, a shattered wreck of my former self. My days of military service were over.

"The newspapers of that day were full of accounts of my interrupted wedding. There is no use in recalling them. As I was about to place the wedding ring on Edith's finger, a hand—*the same hand*—firmly grasped my right wrist. I looked about me and saw nothing.

"Thinking it was a trick of the imagination, however, on account of my nervous state, I attempted to repeat the words of the ceremony, when I felt a kiss from invisible lips. With a cry, I dashed down the aisle and ran from the church."

CAPRON paused in his weird tale. He glanced about him fearfully, and then continued with an effort.

"What I have told you may be impossible to believe. Yet let me assure you that this presence, spirit, or whatever you wish to call it, unseen, yet palpable, is always by my side. If, for any reason, such as meeting you, I for a moment forget it, the soft but firm grasp of a woman's hand reminds me of the past and haunts me."

"No," I replied gravely, "your story does not seem impossible to me. The boys who returned from France, from a greater and more recent war, brought home tales quite as strange as your own. There were 'The Bowmen of Mons,' for example. Did you ever happen to think, Capron, that the greatest force that controls the world, and probably the one beyond the grave as well, is *love?* Just as life and death are its two most profound mysteries.

"Our span of what we call life here is short. That beyond the grave is eternal. By your own words you pledged undying love to this spirit, if such she was and *is*. You had a taste of a quality of love that is unknown to us mortal men."

"No, I had not looked at it in that way," he replied after a few minutes of thought.

"The soul of this woman, Capron," I continued, "which is the *real* part of her, loves you still, or she would not guard you so jealously. She does not mean to haunt you, or cause you sorrow. It is only your own mental viewpoint that has created this anguish down through the years. That, and a fear of the unknown. She knew that you would probably be unhappy with Edith and so prevented your wedding."

"That may be so," he answered with some spirit. "But to have a soul love you, and to love a soul in return! That is impossible! Absurd!"

"Suppose you should see her again?" I asked with a smile, for I still sought to humor the man whom I thought a trifle insane. "What then? You think that you hate her now, or are fearful of her, but should she appear *right now*, you might discover that, ghost or no ghost, your pledge was not made in vain."

Capron gazed at me curiously. He rose to his feet slowly. Leaning across the table toward me, he said in a low, constrained voice, "It *is* strange that the touch has not come tonight. I have been momentarily expecting it. I had not thought of that before. Perhaps the end has——"

He suddenly stopped speaking, gasped and grew pale. He was gazing intently at something that was behind me. Involuntarily, and with an eery sensation, I partly rose to my feet and turned around.

A woman, young and beautiful, dressed in white like a bride, stood there a few feet away. She was ex-

(Continued on page 720)

An Eery Tale Is

SEA CURSE

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

And some return by the failing light
  And some in the waking dream,
For she hears the heels of the dripping ghosts
  That ride the rough roofbeam.
—Kipling.

THEY were the brawlers and braggarts, the loud boasters and hard drinkers, of Faring town, John Kulrek and his crony Lie-lip Canool. Many a time have I, a tousled-haired lad, stolen to the tavern door to listen to their curses, their profane arguments and wild sea songs; half fearful and half in admiration of these wild rovers. Aye, all the people of Faring town gazed on them with fear and admiration, for they were not like the rest of the Faring men; they were not content to ply their trade along the coasts and among the shark-teeth shoals. No yawls, no skiffs for them! They fared far, farther than any other man in the village, for they shipped on the great sailing-ships that went out on the white tides to brave the restless gray ocean and make ports in strange lands.

Ah, I mind it was swift times in the little sea-coast village of Faring when John Kulrek came home, with his furtive Lie-lip at his side, swaggering down the gang-plank, in his tarry sea-clothes, and the broad leather belt that held his ever-ready dagger; shouting condescending greeting to some favored acquaintance, kissing some maiden who ventured too near; then up the street, roaring some scarcely decent song of the sea. How the cringers and the idlers, the hangers-on, would swarm about the two desperate heroes, flattering and smirking, guffawing hilariously at each nasty jest. For to the tavern loafers and to some of the weaker among the straight-forward villagers, these men with their wild talk and their brutal deeds, their tales of the Seven Seas and the far countries, these men, I say, were valiant knights, nature's noblemen who dared to be men of blood and brawn.

And all feared them, so that when a man was beaten or a woman insulted, the villagers muttered—and did nothing. And so when Moll Farrell's niece was put to shame by John Kulrek, none dared even to put in words what all thought. Moll had never married, and she and the girl lived alone in a little hut down close to the beach, so close that in high tide the waves came almost to the door.

The people of the village accounted old Moll something of a witch, and she was a grim, gaunt old dame who had little to say to anyone. But she minded her own business, and eked out a slim living by gathering clams, and picking up bits of driftwood.

The girl was a pretty, foolish little thing, vain and easily befooled, else she had never yielded to the shark-like blandishments of John Kulrek.

I mind the day was a cold winter day with a sharp breeze out of the east when the old dame came into the village street shrieking that the girl had vanished. All scattered over the beach and back among the bleak inland hills to search for her—all save

John Kulrek and his cronies who sat in the tavern dicing and toping. All the while beyond the shoals, we heard the never-ceasing droning of the heaving, restless gray monster, and in the dim light of the ghostly dawn Moll Farrell's girl came home.

The tides bore her gently across the wet sands and laid her almost at her own door. Virgin-white she was, and her arms were folded across her still bosom; calm was her face, and the gray tides sighed about her slender limbs. Moll Farrell's eyes were stones, yet she stood above her dead girl and spoke no word till John Kulrek and his crony came reeling down from the tavern, their drinking-jacks still in their hands. Drunk was John Kulrek, and the people gave back for him, murder in their souls; so he came and laughed at Moll Farrell across the body of her girl.

"Zounds!" swore John Kulrek; "the wench has drowned herself, Lie-lip!"

Lie-lip laughed, with the twist of his thin mouth. He always hated Moll Farrell, for it was she that had given him the name of Lie-lip.

Then John Kulrek lifted his drinking-jack, swaying on his uncertain legs. "A health to the wench's ghost!" he bellowed, while all stood aghast.

Then Moll Farrell spoke, and the words broke from her in a scream which sent ripples of cold up and down the spines of the throng.

"The curse of the Foul Fiend upon you, John Kulrek!" she screamed. "The curse of God rest upon your vile soul throughout eternity! May you gaze on sights that shall sear the eyes of you and scorch the soul of you! May you die a bloody death and writhe in hell's flames for a million and a million and yet a million years! I curse you by sea and by land, by earth and by air, by the demons of the oceans and the demons of the swamplands, the fiends of the forests and the goblins of the hills! And you"—her lean finger stabbed at Lie-lip Canool and he started backward, his face paling—"you shall be the death of John Kulrek and he shall be the death of you! You shall bring John Kulrek to the doors of hell and John Kulrek shall bring you to the gallows-tree! I set the seal of death upon your brow, John Kulrek! You shall live in terror and die in horror far out upon the cold gray sea! But the sea that took the soul of innocence to her bosom shall not take you, but shall fling forth your vile carcass to the sands! Aye, John Kulrek"—and she spoke with such a terrible intensity that the drunken mockery on the man's face changed to one of swinish stupidity—"the sea roars for the victim—it will not keep! There is snow upon the hills, John Kulrek, and ere it melts your corpse will lie at my feet. And I shall spit upon it and be content."

KULREK and his crony sailed at dawn for a long voyage, and Moll went back to her hut and her clam gathering. She seemed to grow leaner and more grim than ever and her eyes smoldered with a light not sane. The days glided by and people whispered among themselves that Moll's days were numbered, for she faded to a ghost of a woman; but she went her way, refusing all aid.

That was a short, cold summer and the snow on the barren inland hills never melted; a thing very unusual, which caused much comment among the villagers. At dusk and at dawn Moll would come up on the beach, gaze up at the snow which glittered on the hills, then out to sea with a fierce intensity in her gaze.

Then the days grew shorter, the nights longer and darker, and the cold gray tides came sweeping along the bleak strands, bearing the rain and sleet of the sharp east breezes.

And upon a bleak day a trading-vessel sailed into the bay and an-

chored. And all the idlers and the wastrels flocked to the wharfs, for that was the ship upon which John Kulrek and Lie-lip Canool had sailed. Down the gang-plank came Lie-lip, more furtive than ever, but John Kulrek was not there.

To shouted queries, Canool shook his head. "Kulrek deserted ship at a port of Sumatra," said he. "He had a row with the skipper, lads; wanted me to desert, too, but no! I had to see you fine lads again, eh, boys?"

Almost cringing was Lie-lip Canool, and suddenly he recoiled as Moll Farrell came through the throng. A moment they stood eyeing each other; then Moll's grim lips bent in a terrible smile.

"There's blood on your hand, Canool!" she lashed out suddenly—so suddenly that Lie-lip started and rubbed his right hand across his left sleeve.

"Stand aside, witch!" he snarled in sudden anger, striding through the crowd which gave back for him. His admirers followed him to the tavern.

Now, I mind that the next day was even colder; gray fogs came drifting out of the east and veiled the sea and the beaches. There would be no sailing that day, and so all the villagers were in their snug houses or matching tales at the tavern. So it came about that Joe, my friend, a lad of my own age, and I, were the ones who saw the first of the strange thing that happened.

Being harum-scarum lads of no wisdom, we were sitting in a small rowboat, floating at the end of the wharfs, each shivering and wishing the other would suggest leaving, there being no reason whatever for our being there, save that it was a good place to build air-castles undisturbed.

Suddenly Joe raised his hand. "Say," he said, "d'ye hear? Who can be out on the bay upon a day like this?"

"Nobody. What d'ye hear?"

"Oars. Or I'm a lubber. Listen."

There was no seeing anything in that fog, and I heard nothing. Yet Joe swore he did, and suddenly his face assumed a strange look.

"Somebody rowing out there, I tell you! The bay is alive with oars from the sound! A score of boats at the least! Ye dolt, can ye not hear?"

Then, as I shook my head, he leaped and began to undo the painter.

"I'm off to see. Name me liar if the bay is not full of boats, all together like a close fleet. Are you with me?"

Yes, I was with him, though I heard nothing. Then out in the grayness we went, and the fog closed behind and before so that we drifted in a vague world of smoke, seeing naught and hearing naught. We were lost in no time, and I cursed Joe for leading us upon a wild goose chase that was like to end with our being swept out to sea. I thought of Moll Farrell's girl and shuddered.

How long we drifted I know not. Minutes faded into hours, hours into centuries. Still Joe swore he heard the oars, now close at hand, now far away, and for hours we followed them, steering our course toward the sound, as the noise grew or receded. This I later thought of, and could not understand.

Then, when my hands were so numb that I could no longer hold the oar, and the forerunning drowsiness of cold and exhaustion was stealing over me, bleak white stars broke through the fog which glided suddenly away, fading like a ghost of smoke, and we found ourselves afloat just outside the mouth of the bay. The waters lay smooth as a pond, all dark green and silver in the starlight, and the cold came crisper than ever. I was swinging the boat about, to put back into the bay, when Joe gave a shout, and for the first time I heard

the clack of oar-locks. I glanced over my shoulder and my blood went cold.

A great beaked prow loomed above us, a weird, unfamiliar shape against the stars, and as I caught my breath, sheered sharply and swept by us, with a curious swishing I never heard any other craft make. Joe screamed and backed oars frantically, and the boat walled out of the way just in time; for though the prow had missed us, still otherwise we had died. For from the sides of the ship stood long oars, bank upon bank which swept her along. Though I had never seen such a craft, I knew her for a galley. But what was she doing upon our coasts? They said, the far-farers, that such ships were still in use among the heathens of Barbary; but it was many a long, heaving mile to Barbary, and even so she did not resemble the ships described by those who had sailed far.

We started in pursuit, and this was strange, for though the waters broke about her prow, and she seemed fairly to fly through the waves, yet she was making little speed, and it was no time before we caught up with her. Making our painter fast to a chain far back beyond the reach of the swishing oars, we hailed those on deck. But there came no answer, and at last, conquering our fears, we clambered up the chain and found ourselves upon the strangest deck man has trod for many a long, roaring century.

"This is no Barbary rover!" muttered Joe fearsomely. "Look, how old it seems! Almost ready to fall to pieces. Why, 'tis fairly rotten!"

There was no one on deck, no one at the long sweep with which the craft was steered. We stole to the hold and looked down the stair. Then and there, if ever men were on the verge of insanity, it was we. For there were rowers there, it is true; they sat upon the rowers' benches and drove the creaking oars through the gray waters. *And they that rowed were skeletons!*

Shrieking, we plunged across the deck, to fling ourselves into the sea. But at the rail I tripped upon something and fell headlong, and as I lay, I saw a thing which vanquished my fear of the horrors below for an instant. The thing upon which I had tripped was a human body, and in the dim gray light that was beginning to steal across the eastern waves I saw a dagger hilt standing up between his shoulders. Joe was at the rail, urging me to haste, and together we slid down the chain and cut the painter.

Then we stood off into the bay. Straight on kept the grim galley, and we followed, slowly, wondering. She seemed to be heading straight for the beach beside the wharfs, and as we approached, we saw the wharfs thronged with people. They had missed us, no doubt, and now they stood, there in the early dawn light, struck dumb by the apparition which had come up out the night and the grim ocean.

Straight on swept the galley, her oars a-swish; then ere she reached the shallow water—crash!—a terrific reverberation shook the bay. Before our eyes the grim craft seemed to melt away; then she vanished, and the green waters seethed where she had ridden, but there floated no driftwood there, nor did there ever float any ashore. Aye, something floated ashore, but it was grim driftwood!

WE MADE the landing amid a hum of excited conversation that stopped suddenly. Moll Farrell stood before her hut, limned gauntly against the ghostly dawn, her lean hand pointing seaward. And across the sighing wet sands, borne by the gray tide, something came floating; something that the waves

dropped at Moll Farrell's feet. And there looked up at us, as we crowded about, a pair of unseeing eyes set in a still, white face. John Kulrek had come home.

Still and grim he lay, rocked by the tide, and as he lurched sideways, all saw the dagger hilt that stood from his back—the dagger all of us had seen a thousand times at the belt of Lie-lip Canool.

"Aye, I killed him!" came Canool's shriek, as he writhed and groveled before our gaze. "At sea on a still night in a drunken brawl I slew him and hurled him overboard! And from the far seas he has followed me"—his voice sank to a hideous whisper—"because—of—the—curse—the—sea—would—not—keep—his—body!"

And the wretch sank down, trembling, the shadow of the gallows already in his eyes.

"Aye!" Strong, deep and exultant was Moll Farrell's voice. "From the hell of lost craft Satan sent a ship of bygone ages! A ship red with gore and stained with the memory of horrid crimes! None other would bear such a vile carcass! The sea has taken vengeance and has given me mine. See now, how I spit upon the face of John Kulrek."

And with a ghastly laugh, she pitched forward, the blood starting to her lips. And the sun came up across the restless sea.

A Tale of Pagan Worship

RIDERS IN THE SKY

By MARC R. SCHORER and AUGUST W. DERLETH

THE following manuscript was found in the temple of the Moon God, Sin, in the ancient city of Ur on the lower Euphrates, by a searching party sent out to discover traces of the vanished expedition of Dr. James Marlowe. It is obviously the diary of Dr. Fenton, Dr. Marlowe's assistant on the expedition:

August 17. We arrived here today, but without our native helpers. Curiously enough, they refused to accompany us to the site of Ur. We are rather at a loss without them, and our excavations must consequently be limited. We will, however, go ahead with the work.

August 27. We have started excavation upon a mount, beneath which we hope to find the ancient temple of Sin, the Moon God, whose chief shrine, Rawlinson says, was at Ur, the city being under the special protection of the Moon God.

September 11. Dr. Marlowe has been unable to get native aid from the surrounding region. For some reason they fear this place.

October 7. We have at last uncovered the temple of Sin, and have cleared quite a space before the temple. All indications point to the reign of Cherdorloamer of the Elamitic dynasty, who reigned at Ur in 1976 B. C., during the greatest power of the ancient Chaldean kingdom of

Ur. The temple is characteristic of those found at Borsippa and Calah, but infinitely larger. The crescent, symbol of Sin, and the eight-rayed disk, symbol of Ai, the Moon Goddess, who presides over life, are present side by side on the high altar.

There is a huge, overturned table before the altar, which we have every reason to believe is a sacrificial table. Tomorrow we shall attempt to raise it.

October 8. Some of our expedition here played a practical joke on us last night. This morning the sacrificial table was set up; so were a number of images of Ai and Sin. The table seemed particularly weighty to us, and it must have taken much effort to set it upright.

Later. Our men consistently deny any hand in the raising of the table, but it is ridiculous to do so. Dr. Marlowe insists on an admission of participation in the affair, but I fear he is doomed to disappointment. It strikes me most peculiarly that the men hold to their view. Surely the table did not lift itself, as they would have us believe!

October 9. There is a strong current of unrest among the men. It must be the affair of the sacrificial table that is so stirring them up; so far no one has admitted a hand in the matter.

Later. Dr. Marlowe is furious. Someone has been at work in the temple, and has uncovered a treasure beneath the altar. It consists mainly of sacrificial vessels in silver, copper, bronze, and beaten gold, very similar to those discovered at Mycenæ by Dr. Schliemann. This discovery has spread among the men, and Dr. Marlowe suspects the existence of a conspiracy to get hold of the treasure. I am prone to agree with him, for there is no telling what men will do in practical isolation such as this. It would be comparatively easy to escape with the treasure to the Euphrates, which lies not far from here. However, I do not believe there is any immediate danger.

October 10. Our men threatened to leave us today. No mention was made of the treasure of Sin, but there was a strong complaint of the sacrificial table affair and of another matter, which the men claim has bothered them since the excavating of the table was finished. It concerns strange noises in the night, of which the men show an almost superstitious fear. They insist that they have heard noises, as of riders in the dark. A great army, they say. This is strange. Personally, I give it no credence, but Dr. Marlowe is struck by it. There is no road within hearing distance, and when I told the men so, they said that the noises did not come from afar, but from near by. This irritated Dr. Marlowe still more, but it appears to me utterly ridiculous. I dismissed them curtly.

October 11. As I feared, the men have deserted with the treasure. Dr. Marlowe says nothing; he is thinking of the advisability of deserting the excavating. But he will never do it.

Later. Dr. Marlowe asked me whether I had heard anything during the night, and when I said I had not, he dismissed the matter.

October 12. Dr. Marlowe seems to have forgotten the desertion of yesterday. He is troubled about something, and has spent his time wandering absently about the excavations.

Later. Dr. Marlowe confided that he had heard riders during the night. "A great beating of hoofs, Fenton," he said, "and if it does not sound too fantastic, of wings." I told him that I had heard nothing, but as I am considerably removed from his tent, it is not unnatural. Dr. Marlowe is situated to one side of the temple. Tonight I shall move to his tent.

OCTOBER 13. There is no doubt of it! There is an army of riders somewhere near, and somewhere there is a great flapping of wings. It was perfectly clear to both Dr. Marlowe and me last night. We left our tent and ventured into the darkness of Ur, but saw nothing. We will watch tonight. Dr. Marlowe says there will be a moon in an unclouded sky; last night, and for some days before, the sky has been overcast, though it is the period of the full moon.

October 14. We watched last night. But I concede nothing we saw! The only explanation of what occurred is that we must have fallen asleep. I remember suddenly hearing, with a great rush and swirl of air, the beating hoofs of a vast army, and the flapping of strange wings.

Suddenly there swept into clear view in the moonlight a great mass of purple things that came from nowhere, from space—from the outermost cosmos. They swept from the sky into the space before the temple, and from there into the interior of the shrine of Sin and Ai, where we followed them at a discreet distance. The crescent of Sin on the high altar shone like fire, and before it were the purple things, undulating in a great mass of fearful grotesques, neither men nor beasts, but a horrible mixture of both, with awful travesties on human faces. They had no arms, but great wings like bats, with long tendrils lashing to and fro like gigantic cilia. Backward and forward this formless mass undulated, amid a low throbbing murmur, worshiping the shining crescent of the Moon God, Sin. A number of the grotesque creatures slithered over the sacrificial stone, and sank down upon its surface in fleshless masses.

This worship continued for long hours, until the red and gray of dawn shone in the east. Then slowly, gathering volume, began that sound of beating hoofs and flapping wings. And the foremost of the purple things began to rise slowly in the air toward the great square opening in the roof of the temple just above the sacrificial table. It was followed by the rest, in a long purple line of formlessness. As suddenly as they had come, so they were gone, and Dr. Marlowe and I were left alone.

I am not willing to believe that this was other than an hallucination. Dr. Marlowe, however, disagrees with me; he bases his opinion on the study of ancient fetishism that he has made. As tonight is the night of the full moon, we are to watch again.

Later. Dr. Marlowe has given up all attempts to identify the purple things. He is convinced that they are from another earth, and is satisfied to call them "moon creatures." Beyond the fact that they worship Sin, he does not attempt to explain their presence in the city of Ur.

Approaching Midnight. We are seated in the temple somewhat left of the sacrificial table, in a small enclosed space shrouded in darkness. I have brought my diary along, to record all that happens tonight. There is a huge patch of moonlight on the floor of the temple that comes from the opening in the roof.

I can dimly hear the hoofbeats in the sky, and the flapping of wings. There is a formless shadow in the moonlight on the floor. Dr. Marlowe, too, hears them coming.

The crescent of Sin is beginning to glow, and—yes, the disk of Ai is glowing also! The purple things are entering the temple as before. Some of them drop from the opening in the center of the roof. There is a certain systematic assemblage of their ranks as they supplicate before the glowing emblems on the high altar. The same low murmuring sound rises from their midst, and the tendrils of their bat-wings lash the air in rhythmic motion. The mass of moon creatures undulates backward and forward.

A few of the creatures are slithering toward the sacrificial table. They climb to its flat surface, continuing to bow before the altar. It is almost as if these purple things led the mass of others. They are turning now, and the undulating movement is slowly ceasing. The murmuring, too, is gone. The three things on the table lash their tendrils in unison; those of the mass are silent. It is from these tendrils that comes the low humming sound I hear.

There is a lull in the tendrils of the three, and a murmur as of assent from the mass. The moon creatures are slowly altering their position, so that they are now facing us. I wonder if we are as perceptible to them as they are to us.

The three on the table are extending their tendrils toward us, and the humming sound again becomes audible. The sound is increasing in intensity; it seems to be affecting Dr. Marlowe.

Dr. Marlowe is rising and going slowly toward the three on the sacrificial table. . . . I called to him, but he did not answer. It is almost as if he were hypnotized. . . . Perhaps he wishes to observe these peculiar purple creatures at closer quarters? . . . But no, he has mounted the table, amid a humming sound from the mass, which is now moving toward him. He is surrounded by these things, but he does not cry out. . . . The purple things are building a pyramid of their bodies—a pyramid that reaches to the opening in the roof and beyond. Vivid flashes of fire come from the glowing emblems on the altar. A blinding flash of light, and the pyramid of bodies crumbles; unhurt, the creatures are reorganizing, and all is as before. But no! Dr. Marlowe is gone!

The three on the table turn again toward me; their tendrils are extending, and I am beginning to feel drowsy.

My God! Dr. Marlowe and I have been sitting in the place reserved for sacrifices to the Moon God! It was Dr. Marlowe who graced the top of that sacrificial pyramid of purple things.

The ghastly humming is beginning again. . . . I can feel the power of those tendrils, drawing me onward . . . onward, outward . . . into cosmos.

The humming is very loud. I wonder where Dr. Marlowe is, and what I am doing here. Glory in the highest to the Great God, Sin! I no longer want to write . . . I am the chosen of Sin's.

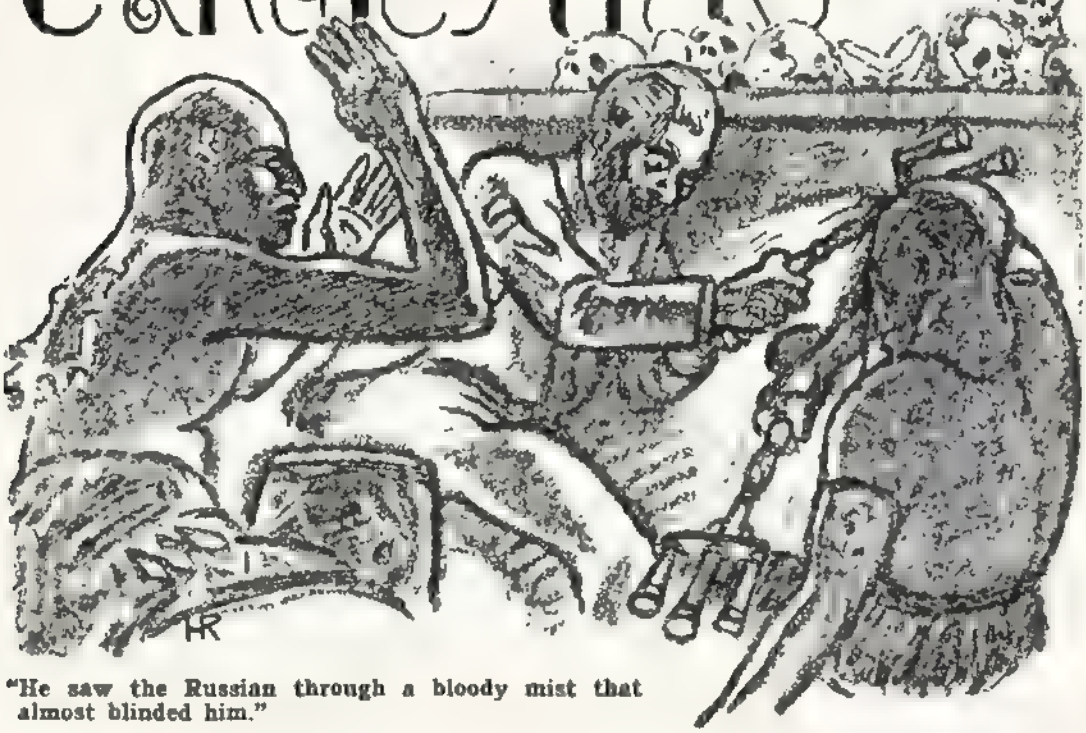
THE following is an excerpt from a letter written to Dr. Gillin, head of the British Archeological Society, and dated early in May of the year succeeding that of Dr. Fenton's diary. It is signed by Dr. Robbins, head of the party searching for Dr. Marlowe:

In regard to the diary I can say nothing—neither that I believe nor disbelieve all this preposterous writing. But there have appeared certain conflicting bits of evidence that are undoubtedly significant. The men referred to in the paragraph dated October 11 were never seen again, so far as we know. Several of our party, out on a scouting expedition, found on the banks of the Euphrates a plate of beaten gold, upon which were engraved the symbolic crescent and disk of Sin and Ai; it is clearly identical with the sacrificial vessels mentioned by Dr. Fenton.

You know that we have discovered no sign of bodies, yet we can not bring ourselves to believe the last entries in the diary. But it is remarkable to write you and tell you that yesterday evening we discovered, on the roof of the temple of Sin, Dr. Marlowe's watch! His name was engraved on the back. The watch was badly smashed, as if it had dropped a long way!

A Wager in Candlesticks

by Robert T. Griebling



"He saw the Russian through a bloody mist that almost blinded him."

DURING the generation or more in which I did business as a New Bedford ship chandler, sailors brought many a strange story of even stranger lands to me. There was that yarn of the girl on Johnnycake Hill, the story of Margaret Vandegrift and the wishing-tree, the weird stories of India and China. There was that old tale Michob Fuller brought with him from the Arctic. I have told and retold them through the years, and never have these yarns lost their relish for me.

One of the strangest of them all was the one old Joab Doane told to his guests at the wedding of Sarah Doane to Peter Bradford. Joab and I had grown up together, and through the years remained fast friends. He always remembered me with a gift of some sort or other when he came home from his whaling voyages: a scrimshawed whale's tooth, carved ivory from Korea, macabre jewelry from India or Arabia.

Joab's vessels would come back from their journeys with a fair regularity, if one can refer at all to whalers as "regular," when their voyages took anywhere from three to seven years, but there was one time when we didn't hear from him for quite a while. Yet he returned in the end, and on a ship not his own; told us he had been wrecked somewhere in the East Indies, and that's all we could learn about him.

He brought a reddish, ugly scar with him; it ran from the middle of his forehead well into the line of his hair, where it disappeared somewhere in its bushy growth. When asked about it, he told us he had been hit by a boom and refused to say more. Of course we never believed that, and we teased him about an accident such as would only happen to a landlubber. He cut us short deftly, and the scar remained a mystery until the day of Sarah's wedding. Then, in one of his rare bursts of confidence, he told us about it.

Joab gave Peter a check for $100,000 and Sarah the most perfectly matched rope of pearls it has ever been my privilege to see. She, quite naturally, asked him where he got it, and then, without any further introduction, he told us the story.

"All of you remember, I believe," he began, "most of the details of my life. You recall my early whaling days and the time when I changed to trading. I hated to give up the thrill of the whale hunt, but did it for my wife and Sarah, and took command of the *Alopex*. Jerez Mitchell was my first mate, and much of my knowledge of trading I gained from him. We tramped along the coasts of South America, around the Horn, across the Pacific, and into the East Indies. Jerez wanted to go to the Indies direct, but I followed the old whaling routes as long as I could.

"On one of our voyages we stopped at the Marquesas for water and then proceeded in the general direction of Papua. But after we passed Tahiti and the Society Islands we were driven before the wind in a terrific gale. We raced toward the south for two days and then were dashed on a reef near an island that wasn't even given on our chart. Every man jack of us was ready for disaster. Our craft had been dashed to pieces in no time, and with the help of a spar, a crate, or a piece of driftwood, we made our way to the island as best we could.

"A pleasant, cheerful sunshine spread itself over the seascape as we swam toward shore. The natives had long ago seen us and came out to help. They paddled us back in their canoes and gave us refreshments. Once on the island, we were immediately conducted to a large hut and quartered there. Fatigued beyond endurance, we threw ourselves on the rattan mats and fell into a deep sleep.

"I don't know how long I remained there, but when I awoke I found a native sitting at my side. He respectfully said to me: '*Parlez-vous français?*'

"'*Un peu,*' I answered. He then told me that 'the Master' wanted to see me, and asked me to follow him. I walked after him as he made his way through the little village, and watched the natives basking in the sun or mending their nets. Once outside the village, my guide turned sharply into a footpath that led through the jungle. We began to ascend, passed a tumbling little rill of water, veered to the left, and then began to climb in earnest. After about five minutes of this we reached a plateau.

"Along this we walked until we came to a clearing in the middle of which, much to my surprize, I saw a wide, comfortable bungalow. A veranda ran all around it, and several natives lolled in the sun before the main entrance.

"My guide turned to me and asked me whether I was fatigued from the climb. I told him I wasn't, but he insisted that I rest on the veranda until 'the Master' was ready to see me.

"I lit my pipe and looked at the landscape. Far below me I could see the shore line, to the left a bit of the village, and in the distance the wide, inscrutable sea. What

manner of man is this, I wondered, who would build on such a deserted island?

"IN THE midst of my ruminations my guide came out and motioned to me. I followed him through a short corridor into a room which was evidently the library. It was long, low, and dark, yet not without its comfort, and thousands of books lined the walls. A few heavy leather chairs stood about the room, in the center of which there was a beautifully carved oak table, bare except for a Persian rug, used as a runner, and a priceless majolica vase. That the owner was a man of taste and refinement was manifest. The object that arrested my attention from the beginning, however, was a fireplace set in the center of the north wall. A mantelpiece, made of a block of solid oak, ran across the top of it. On each end was set a solid silver candlestick, beautifully wrought. One of these was a trifle bent above the base, and both of them showed nicks, as though they had been battered about.

"Between these candlesticks the owner of the bungalow had arranged one of the most gruesome exhibits I had ever seen. Into my heart it struck a terror which I could not dispel, for from one candlestick to the other there was placed an array of skulls. None of them was whole. They were cracked and broken, and entire parts were missing from some of them. God, what a decoration! One of them had only half a jaw. The whole forehead of another was caved in. Three square inches at the base of another were bashed to bits; a fourth had the teeth knocked out of one side of the face; a fifth showed a ghastly cavity where the nose had been; and so on. I can not, at this late date, even begin to describe them all. I can only tell you that they brought to me an overwhelming horror. I kept my eyes on them, despite their ugliness. The center piece—the *chef d'oeuvre,* as it were, of the collection—was a sort of receptacle. Upon closer investigation I found it to be a skull sawed in half. The rim was lined with silver and it had a silver base, daintily filigreed. But before I had time to examine it more closely, my guide walked in, stepped deferentially to one side, and announced:

"'*Le Comte Fiodor Irlamanoff!*'

"I nodded slightly as an immaculately dressed gentleman stepped into the room. He returned my bow and waved me into a chair.

"'Do be seated,' he said to me in French. 'I am overjoyed to be honored with your visit.'

"What he meant by that I was to find out soon enough. Seated at the windows that gave out on the veranda I had a chance to observe my host more closely. He was dressed entirely in white, and over his heart was embroidered a coat-of-arms. His eyes were black, his face swarthy, his hair slightly grayed. He wore an imperial.

"I judged him to be a man of about forty-five or fifty. Not quite stocky in build, he was yet firmly knit, and in a hasty estimate I assumed he could give a very good account of himself in any sort of physical match. I wondered how he kept himself in such perfect condition.

"He noticed at once that I was not a Frenchman, and asked whether I could speak English. I told him I was an American and would prefer to talk in English, although I had picked up enough French in my travels to carry on a conversation. He told me that he, too, could speak the language, as he was a graduate of Oxford. He was a native of Russia, he added. Then he asked me of my voyage, the condition of my finances, the health of my crew, and other matters that occupied my immediate concern. I told him of

our adventures since we had left New Bedford, and since he had never seen a whaling-ship, I offered to take him aboard the next one that came past the island.

"He smiled wistfully at this and said, 'Ah, sir, they do not often come this way.'

"He then gave instructions to have my crew properly taken care of and begged me to stay with him at the bungalow, and he assured me he would entertain me as best he could. I shuddered at the thought of having to stay in the same place that harbored the skulls, but I could not very well refuse. I saw to it that my crew were at ease, told them where I would be in case they wanted me, and went back to the bungalow.

"If there is anything I have to thank Irlamanoff for, I want to thank him for it now, for the days of my stay, with the exception of one somber and sinister influence, were as happy as they could be under the circumstances.

"The Russian was a fascinating conversationist, and he made me laugh time and time again over his pranks at Oxford and over some of the amusing anecdotes of the Russian court. He would tell them at random, upon almost any occasion, while we were hunting, fishing, or swimming in the lovely waters of the bay, where the natives had erected a long breakwater to keep out the sharks. At night, when it often grew quite cool, one of the brown-skinned attendants lit a fire, and then Irlamanoff and I would sit and read, sipping an occasional whisky-and-soda—a remnant of his Oxford days—and later retire after an exhilarating evening among the classics. There was nothing else to do, for the Russian informed me that ships passed by only at great intervals, and that often they would not even stop, for they could not see the tiny smudge which the natives fired whenever they spied a sail.

"But constantly there hovered this sinister influence over these serene days. Something, I sensed, was not quite right with this carefree existence. The skulls, I was sure, had something to do with it. Time and again I would glance at them anxiously, wondering whether the count would ever tell me about them. I dared not ask.

"He saw my eyes wander in the direction of the fireplace one time, and said leisurely, 'You want to know about them? Never mind, I shall tell you—some day.'

"That day—alas!—came all too soon for me.

"SEVERAL weeks later, after the count had delivered a most charming account of one of his many gay episodes, I asked him to tell me why he chose this place to live in, when he surely could have the pick of any city on the continent.

" 'There is an interesting bit of history connected with my move here,' he volunteered. 'My father had intended that I, as the eldest son, should take over the management of our estates in Russia after my return from Oxford. I loathed the country, and dallied at the imperial court as long as I could while on my way back from London. But I had an unfortunate affair with a woman of the court. Have patience; it's not quite the same sort of an affair you might expect to find in some other man. The woman was the wife of a high official, and one night—she took a fancy to me—while we were at a riotous party, she blabbed out a state secret in an intoxicated moment. Innocently enough I repeated it to my father when I arrived on the estate. He was furious and swore that he would have me out of the country; for any careless repetition of what I had

heard—a drunken confidence—might plunge the whole world into war.

"'He communicated with the proper authorities and they arranged to have me cast into exile. The woman and her husband retired precipitantly from court life, and are now, to the best of my knowledge, living in Canada. It was a sore blow to the official—but think of what it meant to me! I had my life before me and was filled to the brim with a *joie de vivre* impossible to suppress. I was so distressed at the idea of leaving Europe that I begged my father to reconsider his resolution. He was too loyal a Czarist to renege, and his Tarquinian severity was well known to me. I knew I was lost. So I asked him if I could tour the world in order to find the place most suitable for me. I found this island and determined to stay. My father arranged all details of settlement.

"'Life began to dull fearfully for me. You can understand what a terrible banishment this must be for a man like me, who at the beginning of a brilliant career in the courts of Europe had to give up everything and live among these native swine. But I realized too well that my presence in Russia might be disastrous. My secret was too important. . . . And so you see me here, a hostage for the peace of the world, merely because I had been made a partner in a confidence for which I did not at all care.

"'But oh for a taste, just a taste of my former life! For glorious adventure, for stirring combat, for just one hour of exhilaration among the people of my kind! Believe me, sir, I longed for it as no man in a dungeon ever longed for liberty. How I recall those rollicking nights, the wines, the company of those precious officers, the intoxicating music of a Viennese waltz, the company of women! It's—it's been a long time ago, but I thirst for this excitement now as I have never thirsted for it before!'

"His voice trailed off into silence. I saw him tremble slightly, as though he were cold. I pitied him. Turning his eyes toward me, he continued:

"'Sir, I am a brave man, and in my fight with this solitude I decided on the brave thing. I determined to pit myself against my fortune. I craved adventure, and for this adventure I was quite willing to give my all—even my life. I created problems, and no matter what their solution, I knew I would win out either way. I have outwitted my fate so far, but there may always come a day when I shall succumb. Do I sound obscure? I will explain.

"'Here is my plan: I decided that whoever came to this island should have a chance to "better his fortune," as they say in French.

"'I planned to give him that chance. There is, of course, some risk connected with the undertaking, but no man can hope to better his chances if he isn't willing to take some risk.

"'I planned to duel with my guests. Not with swords or pistols—I know too much about these weapons, and my adversaries would not have an even chance. So I decided on these candlesticks which you see on the mantelpiece. "Winner take all" was my slogan. Whoever would be the better man would become lord over this domain and be wealthy in his own right. My moneys are great. I would prepare a will, lay it on the mantelpiece, and enter my contestant's name on the blank space. The signatures would be witnessed by two of my natives and the battle would begin. If I won, I would have my adventure and my thrill—God knows they come seldom enough for me—and if the other man would win out, he would take over this estate and the gilt-edged consols I have in the British banks.

"'The plan has worked beautifully for me thus far, and that these others'—he waved a hand at the skulls—'were not able to get their reward has been no fault of mine!'

"His features had changed, and from the suave, cultured gentleman I had seen before me all this time he assumed the guise of a killer. He laughed a cruel laugh and picked up one of the skulls.

"'This one gave me quite a battle,' he said. 'Look at the heavy brows. He was a man of immense height and strength and he almost did for me. But a lucky turn of the wrist and an error on his part, and he lost.'

"I looked at the skull in horror. Despite its thickness it had been bashed in just over the right eye. It was hideous, and before my eyes there arose the vision of that fighting pair, the blood, and the broken, crushed face of the man who succumbed.

"'Come now,' said the count; 'what do you think of it?'

"'I think it's inconceivable,' I answered. 'How can you deliberately plot the life of a man in this way?'

"'Tush,' he answered. 'Remember, we live in an uncivilized country, and this is not looked upon as too gross. Understand me, I do not make this wager with everyone. I only take those whom I consider as good physically as myself, or better. I take the same chances they do. They have the opportunity to become wealthy at one stroke'—he made a quick downward motion with his arm, much as a hatchet-man swings his bolo, and laughed melodramatically—'while I have nothing to gain by combat except the brief thrill. You have had ample opportunity, by this time, to know that the dull hours here are by far the most prevalent.'

"He gave me a long glance that took me in from head to foot, measured me slowly with his eyes, and continued:

"'From the day you landed here you have interested me immensely. I have come to believe, in the days that you have been with me, that you are of my mettle, and so I have chosen you for my next combat. Do you accept the challenge?'

"Suavely, smoothly, graciously he said this, as though he were offering me the chance of an audience at the Kremlin, yet his eyes glistened eagerly as he waited for my reply.

"'I certainly do not,' I said, 'and the sooner you put this out of your head the better it will be for the health of your visitors and for your own mind's contentment.'

"'My mind is content enough,' he replied, and then: 'Ha, a fine one you are to make suggestions! Remember, I am master here, and my word is law. If you do not accept I shall have you shot like a dog before you ever reach the shore. You shall never leave alive, I assure you!'

"The man was mad; loneliness had made him so. And despite his madness I could not help admiring him. He at least was sport enough to risk his life to satisfy his whim. I had to decide quickly. There was no way out. My tongue clove to my palate as I said:

"'Very well; I accept!'

"Irlamanoff gloated; he told me not to be uneasy.

"'We'll draw up the will the next time a ship comes in, and meanwhile—shall we go hunting tomorrow?'

"My look of horror at this casual suggestion must have left an impression, for he continued:

"'Do you find this so extraordinary, my friend? Just because we shall be enemies sometime in the future, that is no reason why we can't be friends now. I intend to be a good host to you, and I have planned your stay here. No treach-

ery with the guns, now—understand? I have too much to lose.'

"I gave him a level glance and said: 'You have my word; I have never broken that and I do not intend to break it now.'

"THE next few weeks would have been among the happiest in my life had not the shadow of our impending duel hung over me. I half wished the time would come, for I had become almost crazed from going through that house with that crazy man, looking apprehensively at the skulls, and seeing visions of my own skull adorning some part of the house. Where would Irlamanoff place it? I often wondered. The mantelpiece was already filled to capacity. Perhaps he would toss it away. At least that would be a better fate than to have it in the room there, where he could point it out and display the gashes, the broken teeth, the shattered jaw-bone or whatever injury the skull would receive in the combat.

"About two months later we saw a sail on the horizon. The natives built a smudge fire to attract attention to the island. A fierce eagerness swept over the count. I had never seen him so jubilant before. His eyes glistened, he rolled them up and around, raised his eyebrows and scanned the waters to see whether the captain of the vessel had seen our signal. The ship changed its course and came toward us.

"Irlamanoff became obsessed with joy. He danced a bit on the green before the bungalow, threw a kiss at the approaching vessel, and cried:

"'Ah, my friend, at last—the great adventure! We go it tomorrow! Let us enter and draw the will.'

"I followed him sullenly. He asked me to sit in the library while he brought the necessary papers. I slumped into a chair and stared at the skulls. By tomorrow night there would either be another skull stuck somewhere about the room, or——

"I did not have time to finish the thought. Irlamanoff returned and drew his chair close to mine. 'So, now we can work,' he said.

"The will was not a lengthy document. It was written in French and its contents were clear: the bungalow to the native chief, the silver to his followers, the trinkets to the Irlamanoffs in Russia. The count's jewels and British bonds were to go to his conqueror.

"Vaguely I answered the questions he put to me regarding the details; I told him again and again that I did not want this fight, that the whole thing was repulsive to me, that I would box him or wrestle him or do anything else to give him that thrill. He looked at me and made a grimace and said:

"'Do you think that such a mild form of sport as a boxing-match would satisfy my craving for the eccentric? Man, you must be crazy! I have spilled blood before—I want to spill it again! I know what I want, so please don't try to suggest such foolishness to me. Remember, I am willing to risk my life for this sport, and the winner will be rewarded handsomely. If I win, I lose, for I do not desire to live here longer; if I die, I win, because death will be a release. If my opponent wins, he becomes wealthy beyond his most extravagant dreams. If he loses, he gets nothing but what he would have received anyway had he not reached this island. Now then, when do you want the combat? The ship's crew will not be here before tomorrow, and I shan't let them come up here until we have settled our score. My natives will entertain them in the meanwhile. What do you say—tomorrow at 6?'

"'As you wish,' I answered.

"'Good,' he replied. 'I shall have one of the men wake you. Now for a little *souper*, eh?'

"He told his natives to bring the meal into the library. I ate sparingly, envying the man who could make such a hearty meal of it with possible death facing him. He also drank heavily. We talked long into the evening, but at last I excused myself and said I wanted to go to sleep. He was quite drunk by this time. He lurched from his chair, clutched me by the shoulder, and exclaimed:

" 'One minute, one minute! You must have a nightcap before you retire—a nightcap such as you have never had in your life!'

"He reached for a bottle, staggered to the mantelpiece, lifted the receptacle from its center, poured the contents of the bottle into it, held it toward me and said:

" 'Drink to your success of tomorrow! Drink it out of the skull of a late adversary of mine! Drink, drink!'

"He tendered the vessel to me mockingly. In anger I dashed it out of his hand. The wine spilled on the floor, the cup rolled to the other end of the room. The sound it made as it bounded over the hardwood was much like a death rattle. I shuddered.

"My host calmly filled two glasses, handed one of them to me, and said, 'Ah, well, my friend, tonight we part—companions; tomorrow we meet as—enemies. Tonight—ah, tonight I am just a little drunk, but tomorrow you shall see me active. I shall be at my post, and, fool,' with a warning good-night, 'see that you be at yours!'

"I took the glass, looked at him with level eyes, and toasted: 'To the best man, then; be on your guard, Irlamanoff!'

"The count lurched from the room, repeating over and over again: 'Never mind; I shall, I shall!'

"And his demoniac laughter echoed through the halls.

"I followed slowly, disgusted with the whole business and in particular with the beast who was my host. Though I tossed about on my bed for more than an hour, I yet fell into a sound sleep at the end. I did not waken until a native tugged at my pajama sleeve.

" 'Come,' he said softly, 'the Master is ready.' With a groan I rose to my feet and ran my fingers through my hair. In imagination I already touched the skull that, in a short time, would adorn this monster's chambers, bashed and broken.

"By God, the thing was unjust! The man was crazy, I knew, yet I felt that in order to protect myself I would have to kill him. Would I? Perhaps there was some way out. God knows I didn't want this quarrel.

"The native must have guessed my thoughts, for he smiled and pointed out of the window. Only too clearly I saw, ambushed in the reeds at the end of the clearing, another native with a bandolier of cartridges slung around his naked body and a Springfield rifle across his knees.

" 'We would follow the Master like sheep,' my native said. 'It is no use. But if you should win, *Tuan*——'

"He did not finish the sentence. We heard the moving of furniture in the library. I walked out of the room.

"I was the first of the combatants to enter the long, low room. I noticed that the table had been cleared away, as had the rest of the furniture. Even the rugs had been carried out. The floor was slippery, and here and there one could see dark stains—like a dance floor, I thought, where a dance of death was about to be begun. But the stains attracted my attention.

"The native saw me, sidled up to me, and whispered: 'They were made by your predecessors. We could never quite rub out the blots.'

"In disgust I turned away and walked to the window. In the harbor I could see the ship; it was an American whaler. Natives in their canoes were going out toward it, greeting the sailors cheerfully, waving brightly colored scarfs and sashes. They were to know nothing, possibly, of this combat, I thought sadly. Perhaps there would be someone else on board that ship who would be a prey to the blood-lust of the count.

"A door opened.

" 'Ah, there you are,' a voice called out.

"It was my antagonist. I turned to meet him face to face. He was again dressed in white. His imperial and his mustaches were waxed like those of a dandy. He looked the picture of health, and yet—I thought I detected deep lines under his eyes. I wondered whether the wine of the night before had had its effect.

" '*Voilà*, my friend,' he said; "now for the final preparations.'

"He clapped his hands. A servant brought something in a box. The count commanded me to take off my shoes and socks. I did so, and a native came over and rubbed the soles of my feet with rosin. He later did the same with Irlamanoff.

"While this was going on, the far alcove of the room had slowly filled itself with several natives. One of them carried a crude drum, another a shepherd's pipe, a third a pair of cymbals. The last man bore a large wooden box made of a resonant wood; in one hand he carried two clappers. Irlamanoff viewed them with evident satisfaction.

" 'You will watch the encounter,' he told the leader in French, 'and you will play accordingly.'

"I stared at the count in astonishment. Blood-music? That's what it evidently was to be, for Irlamanoff never gave them another thought. He turned to me and asked:

" 'Are we ready?'

"I nodded.

"I noticed that his voice had lost the smoothness which it carried when he formerly addressed himself to me. Now he was all steel; the syllables came from his throat with the rattling quickness of the bullets of an automatic rifle. Quickly he strode to the mantelpiece, picked up both candlesticks, and came toward me. I took one of them, he the other; then we both went to opposite corners of the room. Only the orchestra remained; all the other servants had left.

" 'Now,' he said.

"Slowly the drum began to beat with a weird, stifling cadence as we advanced toward each other. This sound never varied throughout the encounter. The man with the pipe followed the count's movements, raising the pitch of his instrument, higher and higher as the count neared. Every move I made was mocked and caricatured by the man with the hollow box. The cymbals had as yet not sounded.

"Irlamanoff walked slowly toward me, twirling his weapon as though it might have been a tennis racket, catching it and then again spinning it. To the strident tones of the pipe, we came within six feet of each other near the center of the room, and then began to pirouette—that is the only word I can use to describe our wary motions. The drum beat on and on: . . . thug . . . thug . . . thug . . . thug . . . thug . . . thug . . . thug. . . .

"ROUND and round we turned, eyes upon eyes, our hands slowly turning the candlesticks. Suddenly he lunged and struck. The pipe gave a high, shrill note and then stopped. I ducked, caught his wrist on my elbow, and the candlestick descended on the thick of my shoulder. The man with the box aped the movements: clack, clack, clack,

clack-clack, clack, clack-clack, clack, clack, clack.

"Outside of a bruise I was not damaged. I began to watch my antagonist more warily. We circled round and round, always looking for an opening, yet seemingly getting nowhere. Perspiration began to ooze out of our brows; we were exceedingly tense. The tom, tom, tom of the drum through it all irritated me; it gave me a headache and dried my throat. With one hand I motioned the man to stop, but he disregarded me. The count began to laugh.

"Even as he laughed he struck, but this time I eluded him by dashing backward several feet. He was tricked by my feint; his piece described a wide circle, and he nearly fell down. But in an instant he was on his feet again, circled, and fastened those dark eyes intensely upon me. The pipe, which had been playing a high, crying tone all this time, lowered its pitch and began to play a few lugubrious notes. He circled; I followed warily. My back was turned toward the window and his face came full into the light. I could see that his eyes were bloodshot, and this fact filled me with a calm to which I undoubtedly owe my life. 'This man may be quick,' I thought, 'but he is no match for me.' He was still feeling the effects of the wine and I determined to give him enough time to play himself out and then force his surrender.

"So I kept on the defensive, watching him intently. My arm began to feel a trifle numb where he had hit me. For the third time he struck, and this time we clashed. With a shriek the cymbals dashed together as our weapons met, the drum boomed, the hollow box crackled, and the pipe shrilled its way into the highest register and stayed there. The candlesticks crashed time and time again, yet neither of us could get a direct hit. It was excellent parrying. Once I came close enough to him to strip a piece of skin from his jaw—and I thought the pipe would shiver to bits in its agony—but outside of that he was unscathed. Still we clinched instead of breaking away. We clubbed at each other's ribs or held each other's fighting arms at bay. The man at the box beat a savage rat-tat-tat on his instrument as the candlesticks thudded on our sides. I dared not let go until I knew that I could retreat to the safety of distance. Irlamanoff knew that too, and held to me as long as he could.

"But finally I broke and got away safely. The racket in the corner died down to a sob; only the drum kept up its steady beating. Thus we encountered and broke time and time again, leaving the fray with bruised muscles or cracked ribs. But suddenly he determined to make his great attack, for he lunged. This time I did not elude him. Though I caught his upraised hand with my left, I had not the power to stay the blow. The candlestick struck me over the eye—just where you see this scar. Simultaneously the cymbals clashed. I was blinded by blood and stunned by the shock. I lost my head and lashed about freely with my leaping candlestick. The music, if I can call it that, struck up again, weird and sensuous, lascivious and sadistic in its interpretation. Irlamanoff gave several short grunts that told me my blows had found their target. I went to close in on him, but before I could get a firm grip he writhed like a cat and wrenched himself loose.

"We were both beside ourselves by this time. The music lashed us on to a bestial fury. I was ready to kill; he had been ready for a long time. But he stayed away from my right arm and again circled. By and by my head became clearer, though I felt weak from loss of blood. I could hardly use my left arm defensively

because I constantly had to brush the blood out of my eyes.

"Irlamanoff determined upon a last attack. Catlike he came nearer and nearer. At first I did not notice him, but the pipe, which he had in the room in order to blare his triumph, this time served to warn me of his attack. Subconsciously, through the struggle, I had noted the soaring notes as we came close to each other, and the low, macabre tones when we were distant. Now the pipe played high and shrill. As I looked he leaped. I saw, through the bloody mist that almost incapacitated me, the glint of the stick in the sun.

"I brought my own stick against this bit of sunny brightness—all that I could see in my dazed condition; heard the clash of metal upon metal; saw his piece go spinning against a wall and then drop to the floor.

"The count was holding his hand. I noticed that his right arm was fearfully bent, and knew that I had broken it.

" 'Ahhhh,' he said several times, 'ahhhh, what have you done?' And then: 'Oh, my God!'

"With a wrench and a groan he flung out his arms and waited for me. His face was livid, sweat rolled from his brow, and his arm had already begun to assume an ugly color.

" 'Come,' he said finally. 'Why do you not come?' I stood stockstill, the candlestick in one hand. I was so glad the struggle was over that I could find no words. Again he pleaded:

" 'You have won; finish me.' He said it listlessly, yet it was more than a request; it was a sob, a prayer, a plea for release from his unhappy existence. He wanted to be rid of it, yet wanted that one great adventure in his life to come at this moment—and I could not give it to him.

"I threw aside my piece, walked up to him, and said, 'We've had enough of this nonsense. Let's clean up.'

"He tottered toward me, a look of unbelief on his face. 'What,' he queried, 'you're not going to bean me?' I almost smiled at this quaint Oxford remnant.

" 'No, of course not.'

"He looked at me, saw that I meant it, and sank to the floor in a huddled heap. The orchestra, which had been quiet for the last few minutes, filed slowly out of the room. Irlamanoff began to sob.

"I made a move toward the door, but he beckoned for me to sit down. I went to the window and there saw the sailors in the main street far below and thanked God that I would soon be with them. All the while I looked, the man beside me sobbed, quietly, brokenly. His wrist was now quite swollen, as was the arm above it. This must have given him considerable pain.

"At last he spoke: 'You have won the wager. All I have is yours.'

" 'Thanks,' I said tartly, 'I don't want any of your goods. All I want is a promise from you.'

" 'A promise?'

" 'Yes; I want you to promise me that never again will you put another living soul in needless jeopardy.'

" 'That's easy,' he said with a forlorn laugh; 'now that I have nothing I will not be able to make this sort of wager.'

" 'The place is still yours, so are the jewels and the consols; I don't want them,' I said. 'But I do want that promise.'

"He gave it, and I suggested that we have breakfast after we cleaned our wounds. I helped him up, and as I did so, my eye fell on the skulls.

" 'One thing more,' I said as we were leaving the room. He followed my gaze and understood even before I made the suggestion. 'I want you to destroy those skulls; they'll leave a bad impression on you!'

" 'I never want to see them again after this,' he said, and called a servant, who quietly removed them. The mantelpiece looked curiously blank.

The natives helped us to wash, dressed our wounds, bandaged them, and then served breakfast to us on the veranda. The sight of that ship, which was so soon to take me back to New Bedford, almost made me cry. The whole thing seemed like a nightmare.

"I ATE a hearty breakfast, though the count ate hardly anything. Following the meal we had a drink together, and then I rose.

" 'I shall return with this ship, as you know,' I said. I gripped his left hand—for his right was in bandages—and continued, 'And I know you will not break your promise to me.'

"He gave his word and then added, 'But you must take something from me.'

" 'I shall be glad to take only my liberty,' I replied, and strode off the veranda toward the path that would lead me to the shore.

"I reached my crew and shook hands happily with the sailors from the other ship. It proved to be the bark *Morning Star*, just up from a whaling voyage, and its hold was loaded to the gunwales with the precious oil. The long-boat had already left with one load of men and was now coming back for the second. Of course my men would not leave until I had been taken along. I was plied with questions concerning my mishap, but I refused to talk about it.

"Just before the long-boat put out for the ship we heard a shrill cry from the top of the hill, and a moment later saw a figure in white run down the path. In a trice Irlamanoff—for it was he—came to the clearing at the beach and ran toward us. I had to marvel at his strength, for I knew the pain he was in, knew exactly where I had struck him half an hour before, and knew that I felt so stiff from the encounter that I could move only laboredly.

" 'Please accept this as a keepsake,' he muttered, and thrust a flat box into my hand. Then he waved good-bye and walked slowly toward the village.

"On board ship, when I was finally left alone in my cabin, I had occasion to look into the box. There they were, this very rope of pearls which I gave my Sarah for her wedding. When I returned to America I placed them in a safe deposit vault in Boston, and I have kept them there ever since."

"And that's where they're going right after this wedding," Sarah had exclaimed.

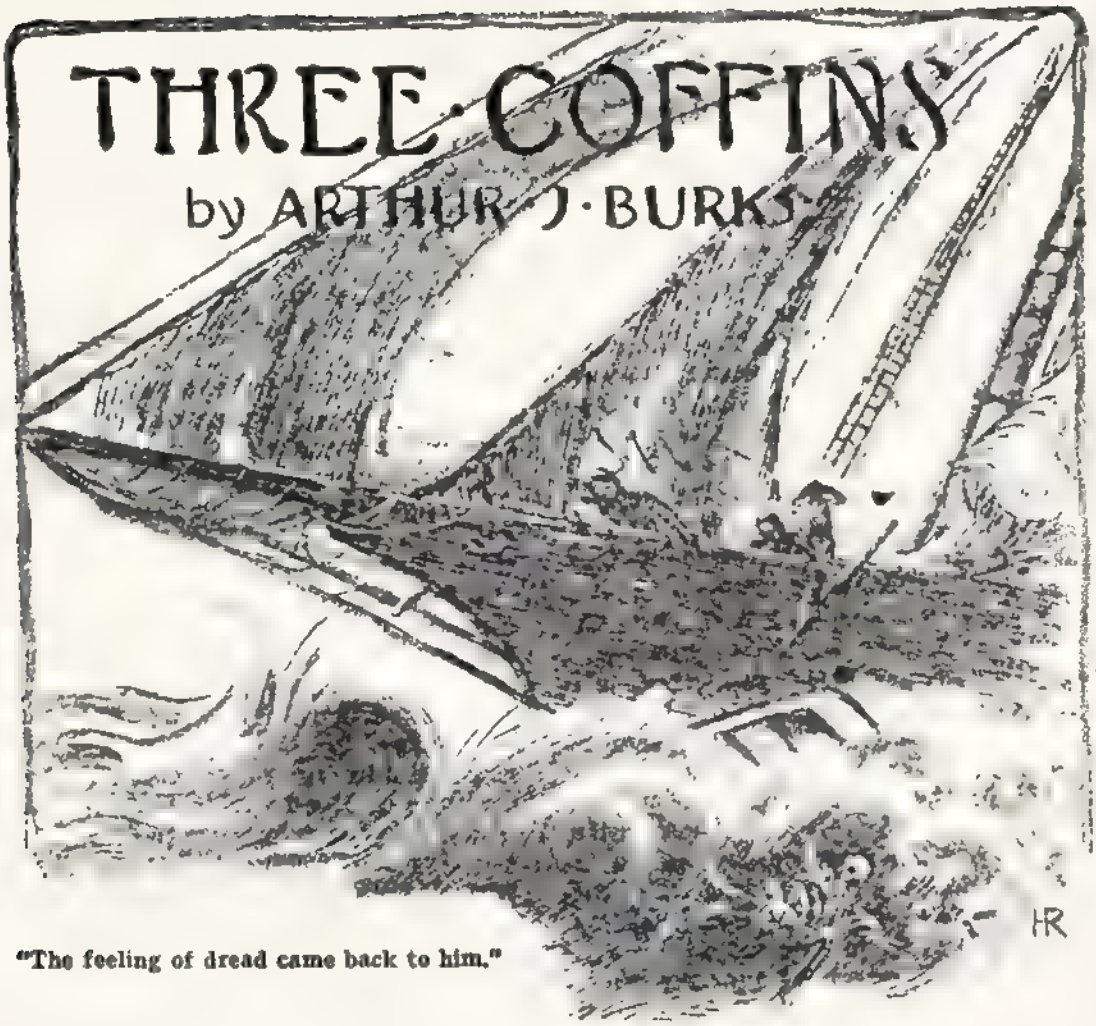
"Why?" her father asked.

"Because pearls mean tears, and I shall be reminded of your ghastly story every time I wear them and shall probably cry about it whenever I think of it."

"I'm sorry, then, that I told you about them." her father said.

THREE COFFINS

by ARTHUR J. BURKS



"The feeling of dread came back to him."

"YOU had better take them," said Lieutenant Wilson, for the tenth time within the space of an hour.

I was standing moodily at the door of the *iduana* as he spoke, looking out at Barahona's mahogany wharf where our little sloop, the *Manelik,* rode jauntily at her moorings. I whirled toward him. Why, in God's name, should he insist upon pressing these gruesome things upon me when my heart was already heavy with a nameless foreboding which, for the life of me, I could not dispel?

"Blast it, Wilson," I almost shouted, "can't you realize what effect those three coffins would have upon my blacks? It will take us two days to raise Beatta Island, and there is no place on the boat where we could carry those coffins except right on deck—where the negroes could see them during every waking hour aboard. They speak English, those men, because I got them from the English-speaking settlement near Samana; but there their resemblance to the white man ends. They are still as superstitious as were their forefathers of the Congo."

"But, Carver," insisted Wilson, "stop to think a moment, man! There will be three white people, besides yourself, with your outfit. These three must remain on Beatta Island

for an indefinite period, while you will be at liberty to come and go. What if one of them dies? If a negro goes he may be buried on the island. If one of your subordinates happened to die you would wish his body returned to the States. It would require at least three days, traveling with your best speed, for you to reach Barahona in case of the death of a white man. Another day before a ship could reach Beatta from the capital, carrying a suitable coffin; one day for the return to the capital: five days in all, during which the dead would remain unburied. This is the tropics, Carver—and the dead do not keep."

"All right, Wilson," I said in desperation; "break out your caskets. We'll take them with us."

I knew as soon as I had made the decision that it had been unwise. I tried to argue with myself that Wilson spoke truly; for the government coffins were air-tight, and in them the dead could be buried and preserved for the arrival of a boat.

I shook my head impatiently, stepped to the door of the *iduana*, in which Lieutenant Wilson of the *Policia Nacional* had his headquarters, and beckoned to one of my blacks lounging on the wharf near the *Manelik*. He came toward me in a shambling sort of trot.

"Hurry to the Hotel Central," I told him, "and tell Williams, Gordon and Oliver to report to me at once. As soon as you have told them, come back to the *Manelik* and break out the rest of the men for a working party. Lively now, for we sail as soon as possible."

Once more he moved at that shambling trot of his, and in twenty minutes the three white men stood before me. I saw at once that all three had been looking upon the wine while it was red, and white, but their inebriation had not gone beyond the stage of boisterous hilarity. They greeted me loudly and slapped one another upon the backs with hearty good fellowship.

I turned back to Lieutenant Wilson. As I did so the blacks from the sloop gathered at the foot of the wooden steps leading to the door of the *iduana*.

"All right, Wilson," I said; "where are they?"

"Right under this building," he replied.

"Can you turn them over to me without a lot of government red tape?"

"Sure. They've been here for God knows how long. From all I can learn, the government has lost them from the property return."

"Are they in good condition?"

"Yep. Were the last time I examined them."

The lieutenant leading the way, we quitted the *iduana* and stopped before a padlocked door beside the flight of wooden steps and below the level of the *iduana* floor.

I turned to the three whites who were to aid me in erecting a stone building on Beatta Island—a building which the government had ordered and for which all specifications had been drawn up: an island prison.

"Here, you men," I said; "get these things aboard at once. We sail immediately."

The lieutenant had unlocked the door and, stooping, had entered the cryptlike room under the *iduana*. Williams, Gordon and Oliver, still laughing and kidding one another, followed him. They shouted to the blacks, who willingly placed muscular hands upon the three long wooden boxes which, because of the darkness, they could not see.

The great boxes, with their outer casings of unlovely wood, were dragged forth and lowered to the ground.

It was Williams the irrepressible who first realized what they were.

"Hey, you Gordon and Oliver," he shouted, "look what the boss is carting along! Three wooden overcoats—one for each of us!"

An eery chill crept through me at the words, which had in them a vague sort of prophecy.

The superstitious blacks were quick to note this, too. They drew back hurriedly, as though the coffins had been hot to their hands, and, drawing off, began to whisper excitedly among themselves in Spanish—a language which they spoke as well as English.

I could have struck Williams for his thoughtless remark. Confound it, he knew quite well what a time I had persuading those blacks to go to Beatta in the first place! Beatta, that dreary, God-forgotten blob of land south of the peninsula where that brutal Dominican dictator, Lili, had banished so many people of both sexes to die; that island which the natives say is inhabited by the spirits of the restless dead, and upon which no Dominican will set foot after nightfall.

By dint of much profanity and coaxing, I finally persuaded the negroes to continue the work of removing the coffins to the *Manelik*.

And a dreary cortege it was. The coffins were very heavy and the men were compelled to walk slowly. It was almost as though it were a funeral procession, moving softly out across the wharf as though intent upon consigning to Neiba Bay the bodies of three who had passed.

Williams had imbibed just enough to deaden his native shrewdness, and had not noted the havoc his thoughtless remark had caused.

Now he went a step further. He had seized upon an end of one of the coffins to encourage the blacks, and while he was in that position another nonsensical idea came to his mind.

With a mock show of reverence he removed his hat and placed it atop the coffin!

The negroes should have laughed at this, but they didn't. All down that line of slowly moving men the blacks in turn removed their shabby headpieces and placed them in twin rows upon the coffins which they carried! What with that sense of nameless foreboding which already weighed me down, this concerted action did not tend to lift my gloomy spirits, you may be quite sure of that.

We placed the three coffins on the deck of the *Manelik* and covered them with a tarpaulin.

And the blacks forgot them for the moment in the hurry and bustle preparatory to casting off.

WE HAD the usual trouble of the sailing-boat in clearing Punta Martin Garcia. For it juts out into Neiba Bay and shuts off the breeze which is needed to fill the sails. We tacked back and forth monotonously for three hours before we cleared the bleak headland. The sun had gone down and the lights in Barahona were twinkling like fireflies before we finally nosed into the breeze and the Dominican skipper gave the word to put the tiller over for the long run down the coast.

The boom crashed athwartship swiftly as she came about, while the curbed bit of metal securing its end to the gooseneck rasped harshly and gratingly in protest.

One of the blacks had been standing in the path of the boom, staring moodily back at the lights in Barahona. No one had noticed him in time to shout a warning. The heavy stick struck him at the base of the skull, lifting him clear of the deck and hurling him over the side.

"Man overboard!"

We circled the spot three times before the Dominican skipper announced himself as satisfied to proceed without the unlucky black. For my part I knew that the blow from the boom had killed the negro and that, even as we searched about the spot where we had last seen him, the sharks were probably feasting upon his flesh —or circling about his sinking body until satisfied that he did not live.

The breeze had freshened noticeably as we swung back upon our course, and just as the skipper gave the word to hold her steady—he having picked out his course by observing the Barahona lights and those which he knew to be below Juan Estaban on Point Averna—a fierce, moaning gust of wind swooped down from the clouds which were gathering swiftly above our heads, and snatched away the tarpaulin that covered those three coffins.

Writhing, twisting, whipping this way and that as though in agony, the tarpaulin flew away on the wings of the wind—away to port and the open Caribbean.

As I watched it disappear in the darkness, a weird flapping shadow against the distant horizon, it made me think shudderingly of a shroud that has been torn sacrilegiously aside by a vandal's hand.

The blacks were grouped now in a reclining mass on the deck, well away from the coffins, but they started nervously as the tarpaulin flapped eerily over the side. Some of them rose to their knees and followed with their eyes the flight of the blanket of canvas; others looked in every direction except toward the canvas and that trio of coffins.

Their superstitious minds were seizing upon every little happening, augmenting its potentialities until already, in the first few hours of our journey, I realized that almost anything might cause them to overpower the three other whites and myself and put back to Barahona. I could tell by reading their smoldering eyes that they felt themselves embarked upon a voyage of ill omen.

I was going to Beatta. I knew in my heart that all my fantastic ideas of the afternoon had been born of sleepless nights in the tropics, and that, once we were upon the island, everything would run smoothly. The successful erecting of that building for the government meant that I could return home—*home,* do you hear me? —for the first time in three long years, and with money in my pockets. It would take much to compel me to abandon the project—even though I knew that the only reason the contract had been offered an American was that no Dominican would accept it. The best educated of them are abject with fear when there is even a whisper of ghosts.

And Beatta is believed to be filled with them, while even on the mainland, three miles away, the natives claim that they can hear their wailing when the wind is right—banshee screams which float across the strait between, causing pickaninnies to whimper against their parents' sides in the darkness of huts which are barred and double-barred against the evils of night-time.

I was pondering upon these wails, which even white people of my acquaintance had claimed to have heard from the mainland, and trying to persuade myself that they were but the moaning of the waves which dash skyward along the coastal cliffs of Beatta, where the rocks are honeycombed with holes and dusky caverns built by the sea.

Is it any wonder then, that, pondering on these eery wails, my flesh went cold where I sat in the sternsheets, as a terrible wail suddenly rent the air aboard the *Manelik* itself? Ripping the murky silence, cutting through the roaring of the waves which crashed against our starboard quarter, mounting skyward swiftly as though an unseen ghostly body fled up the shrouds, the chilling wail brought every soul aboard the *Manelik* up standing.

The negroes were on their feet, scared eyes turned toward those coffins on the deck, giving back slowly toward me as though seeking protection of a white man, while up from the blackness of the hold came the three white faces of Williams, Gordon and Oliver, which trio had gone below to

sleep off the effects of Barahona's hospitality.

I pushed my way through the cordon of negroes, pausing where I could see those three coffins, side by side upon the deck. Not a soul was up forward there, not a thing that moved near those coffins. Yet the wail had issued, apparently, from one of those gruesome wooden boxes. Then I caught a glimpse of something that moved near the middle coffin.

My three white subordinates were beside me now. I looked into their faces to see what they made of it and saw that they were white and drawn, the eyes starting oddly from their sockets. Cold sober now, the three white men were shaking as though they had the ague.

The veneer of civilization had dropped from them and they were in the grip of a superstitious fear rivaling that which numbed the tongues of the usually garrulous negroes.

I whirled as a shaky laugh came from just behind me. It was the Dominican skipper, and he, too, was afraid—filled with doubt, as I could tell by his senseless laughter. But he thought he knew whence came that wailing sound—thought he knew but was not sure. He feared to investigate and find himself wrong.

"It ees my little *perro*—my what-you-call-heem-in-English? — my little dog!"

Broken English. But it filled me with hope. Hope that my blacks would not be stampeded. I knew that I was the one to whom they all, even the three whites, looked for guidance. With an oath I walked steadily forward to where the three coffins lay bare on the deck beyond the step of the mast—and found a scrawny Dominican mongrel crouched in the shelter of the middle coffin!

He lifted his nose to repeat the long-drawn wail just as I bent to grasp his muzzle; but my hand about his nose choked off the sound.

The tension relaxed aboard the *Manelik*. The negroes sprawled again upon the deck—well away from those three coffins. The three whites returned to the warmth and darkness of the hold. I took the tiller from the trembling hand of one of the crew, bidding him get what sleep he might upon the deck.

The hours wore on and darkness settled heavily upon the face of the Carribean Sea. With my hand on the helm I gave a point and took one, methodically, my mind busy with fantasies. I thought that the negroes slept.

But to my straining ears—straining to catch vagrant sounds that I really did not wish to hear—came the low whispers of two of the blacks. Whispers in the English of Samana.

"What for did that mutt howl, huh? They only howls like that when death is nigh!"

I strained my ears to catch more of the whispers, but I caught no other intelligible words, and heard nothing but the moaning of the waves which broke against our starboard quarter, the soughing of the wind in the sails—and the creaking of the three coffins as they rubbed gently together with the rolling of the *Manelik*.

2

The blacks slept at last—or I thought that they did. The waves continued to break against our starboard quarter. The wind played an eery tune in the sail and rigging. The *Manelik*, stout victory of the native shipbuilder's art, rode the seas bravely, rocking gracefully from side to side. There was the grating sound as the mooring lines gave and grew taut with the playing of the boom, the bubbling of the water beneath the keel, the foaming where the cutwater slashed through the waves—and the persistent grating of the coffins as they rubbed together with the rolling of the *Manelik*.

I alone, of those aboard the boat, watched and listened. I was surprized that the superstitious negroes had been able to woo Morpheus so successfully. Their limp bodies gave and lurched with the movement of the boat —gave and lurched even as did the silent coffins forward of the mast.

I likened myself whimsically to the Ancient Mariner among his dead, and to pass the hours more rapidly I tried to recall verses of the poem. I could not do so, but the thought of them caused weird fancies to scurry through my imaginative mind.

I was a spirit at the helm of a ghost ship, piloting my silent bark, loaded to the gunwales with useless human clay, through a gloomy ocean, uncharted hitherto by living men. The mongrel dog of the Dominican skipper came up from the hold to sniff and smell at the bare feet of the negroes; he became, to my fancy, a fetid-mouthed hyena searching for carrion, a weird moving shape in the waist of the little vessel. A negro shifted suddenly, groaned in his sleep—and the dog jumped back affrighted, as though the dead, unexpectedly, had moved. The animal moved away then, out of my sight.

But it was far worse when the rain began to fall and the negroes, plunging pell-mell into the hold, left me alone on the deck with those three coffins and my moody fancies.

And with the coming of the rain the wave crests loomed higher off the starboard quarter, and broke at the crest in wisps of flying spume that took on weird shapes against the blackness of the night. I donned my poncho and drew my neck down into it like a turtle returning to his shell, and looked ahead through the veil of raindrops which fell from the brim of my hat.

A ragged wisp of flying spume detached itself from the crest of a wave and hurdled the vessel near the bow, twisting oddly as it flew, reminding me of the tarpaulin which had fled away from atop the coffins—only, in its whiteness, it had more the appearance of a shroud.

Another wave towered above the quarter, breaking into spray as its top bent over, and the spray took on a ghostly shape for an instant, as though a white-wrapped woman strove to free dragging limbs from the grip of the sea.

We made exceptionally good time that night, as I could guess when, toward morning, the lights of Enriquillo blinked at me through the blackness and the misting rain. Onward we scudded, into the south. I had no fear of reefs, for I had sailed this bleak coast before and knew that the roaring of the reefs could be heard long before they were close enough to place a craft in danger.

Then, crashing forth like the roaring of distant thunder, there came an eery bellowing from the mist-shrouded coastline—bellowing as of a mammoth imprisoned in some deep cavern—bellowing that died away in choking grumbles, as though water had surged up about the nostrils of the mammoth, drowning his bellowing.

I knew then that we had cleared El Guanal and were opposite the spouting rocks of La Rabiza—that dreary lava bed which lies at the eastern end of the heartbreaking Camino de Los Quemados.

I knew that we were making a record for the trip, and when the grayness of dawn appeared in the east I called a negro to the wheel and left orders that I should not be called until he had sighted Beatta Island. I could see the black man's face become a blotchy blue and knew that I dared not trust him alone at the wheel, for his eyes were bulging horribly as they stared at those three grim shapes amidship. I called another black to keep him company and crept into the warm hold, where, closing my nostrils against the fetid odors there, I lay down and fell instantly to sleep.

I awoke suddenly. I don't know how long I had slept, but the in-

creased warmth of the hold told me that the sun was high in the heavens. Subconsciously I knew that the blacks had recovered their spirits and that they had been singing as they worked above me, preparing to disembark. Therefore I wondered at the strained silence that had settled over the *Manelik* just as I opened my eyes in the darkness of the hold. Something was wrong on deck.

I climbed out and looked about me.

The blacks were grouped tensely in the bow, forward of the three coffins, staring ahead at a slimy shape which bobbed up and down in the waves directly in our course. We were in the yellow- waters which course through the strait separating Beatta Island from the peninsula; and the island itself, wreathed in spray along the visible coast, was on our starboard bow.

But the blacks, and my three white subordinates, were not looking at the bleak island. Their eyes were intent upon that slimy shape that bobbed in the yellow water ahead of us.

Williams turned to me as I elbowed my way into the bow.

"Looks like a small boat, Mr. Carver," he said. "I told the skipper to run it down, so that it would not be a menace to other small boats which might collide with it in the dark."

As he spoke, our bow, rising high on a wave, dropped suddenly down upon the bobbing cockleshell, splitting the soggy boards asunder and spreading them helter-skelter on the waves.

The old feeling of dread, which had been with me during the long watch of the night just passed, came back again redoubled, when I saw that bedraggled shape which began slowly to sink when the little boat was demolished.

It was the body of a woman long dead, who clasped a tiny babe to her bosom. This I knew from the clothing which still clung to the skeleton; for mother and babe were fleshless—at least where the eye could see—and the dead eyes that looked up at us were empty holes in a pair of grinning skulls!

The two had died miserably of starvation, in sight of land perhaps—where they had floated days and hours until they had died and birds had feasted upon their flesh.

They dropped from sight, mother and babe together, in the yellow waters.

A higher wave than any yet encountered lifted high the bow, and there was a harsher grating sound behind us. As one man we turned to stare.

It was the motion of the ship—nothing more. But the motion had crashed those three coffins together and they had seemed to groan in unison.

"They's talkin', boss!" shouted one of the negroes suddenly. "They's tellin' us jus' as plain that they is empty! They's callin' to one of us this very minute!"

His words sent wild panic surging through the others. But, even though I smote the speaker across the mouth with my open hand and shouted to him to keep silent, he kept up his babbling as though he had not heard me or felt the blow—and blood was trickling from the wound where I had cut his thick lips.

There was a concerted movement aft. I drew my automatic and sprang free of the milling blacks.

"Maybe the coffins were screeching for a victim," I cried, "and the first man to lay hand upon the tiller will be that victim! Who is it to be?"

They halted uncertainly, looking wildly this way and that. One of the blacks stepped forward, pausing a respectful distance away.

"Let's hurry and git offen this boat," he said, "and do something with those coffins! Another day aboard this boat with them will drive these folks to murder."

The man who spoke was the oldest of the lot—a shrewd negro who knew

his kind. I holstered my automatic and nodded.

"All right," I agreed; "forget about the coffins. We'll land on the island before noon."

"Sure!"—it was the irrepressible Williams, backing me up—"why are you fellows worrying about these coffins, anyway? Didn't you hear me say yesterday at the *iduana* that these wooden overcoats were reserved for Gordon, Oliver, and me?"

Once more the fateful prophecy, which I shall remember always.

We were close in now, and the Dominican skipper and I were scanning the coast of Beatta Island for the massive pile of building materials which government boats had dumped off against our coming. I saw it at last, well out on a jutting neck of land. The boom was put over and we headed in, coming to anchor in three fathoms of water.

The skipper shook his head at me as he saw the flying spume along the coast where we must land. He spoke rapidly in Spanish, lowering his voice so that the blacks could not hear.

"Dangerous surf," he said, "hard to land in small boats."

I knew that he spoke truth. It is an axiom of the sea that surf which can be seen from the sea is dangerous for landing. But when I thought of another night aboard the boat with those gruesome coffins I decided to risk it, telling the skipper that I myself would guide the first boat in.

It splashed over the side and I took my place in the stern, standing erect as I had seen Dominican boatmen do, with a steering oar outthrust to serve as a rudder. Such supplies as we needed were dumped in the bottom of the boat, and we cast off, six of the blacks going with me, four of them wielding the oars.

We had to back in, and it required all of my skill to keep us from broaching to. But we made it, with no other accidents than a thorough wetting of all hands. I dreaded to watch the other two boats come in. These would carry a coffin each, while my boat was going back for the third.

I heaved a sigh of relief when the landing was completed without loss of life, for we had passed through the dangerous surf against my better judgment.

I signaled the skipper, and the *Manelik* made sail and scudded away to sea, leaving us alone on bleak Beatta Island.

Just back of us I saw a hole in an outcropping of rock—an ideal place to cache the three coffins. These were disposed of first, and driftwood piled high over the entrance to hide the grim objects from view. A great weight seemed to be lifted from the spirits of the negroes.

The rest of the day was spent in adding our pile of supplies to the great pile of building materials, and in erecting the tents in which we were to live until better shelters could be provided. The negroes sang as they worked, and the old man who had begged for the others aboard the *Manelik* outdid himself as a cook.

When night began to come down upon us, my gloomy forebodings had begun to seem ridiculous. We were all of half a mile from where we had cached the coffins. I prayed—I who had almost forgotten the meaning of prayer—that we might never need them.

We were a cozy encampment. The four tents of the whites stood two and two, entrances facing, while the tents in which the blacks lived in pairs were within calling distance. The supplies which the government had left included a large quantity of kerosene, and I gave the negroes permission to burn their lanterns until 10:30 each evening.

The first night passed without matter of moment, and our first day was spent in clearing the ground for the foundation of the great prison

which the Dominican government had in mind.

What a ghastly place for a prison! An island, miles away from the nearest place where freemen dwelt; peopled, if legend spoke truly, with naught but the spirits of the restless dead, where those who might in future be doomed to live out their lives here in solitude must oft awaken in the silence of the night to listen to the wailing of wandering souls out there upon the sandy tableland which is Beatta Island! That ghastly charnel house of the brutal dictator, Lili! What genius of torture had thought of this place as a prison site?

We dug down where the center of the prison was to be until we came to the solid rock of the island. Then we began to shape the excavation to receive the concrete forms.

An hour before quitting-time we had completed the rough work, with the exception of an uneven residue of earth where one corner was to be. Feeling that we had done well for this day, I gave the men permission to stop for a rest and smoke before clearing away this bit of earth, and when I gave the word again the blacks fell to work heartily, buoyed up by the thoughts of the food which the aged one would have prepared against their coming.

The first man to reach that fateful corner sank his pick deep into the soil.

The point struck against something solid, which gave forth a hollow sound. Knowing the history of the island, by report at least, I dreaded for the diggers to continue. But it was too late to change the site of the prison, even had the matter been of sufficient importance. We might uncover worse things in another place. The eyes of the blacks were large when the sound was heard, and to the last man they fell suddenly silent, giving back from the man with the pick.

This one dropped his implement suddenly and stepped back, wiping his sweaty ebon face with the sleeve of his shirt.

"I don't know what it is, boss," he said quaveringly, "but I don't want to be the nigger that uncovers a coffin!"

Williams seized the discarded pick and plunged it once more into the dirt, every stroke emphasizing his contempt of consequences.

Moldy, fuzzy with dried fungous growth, all but rotted away, it was a coffin, a native one, that Williams uncovered. He dragged it ignominiously forth with his pick. It fell to pieces at once, giving us view of the contents.

Another grinning skeleton! No need to tell us the sex of this one, for there lay the brassy finger-rings and falsely glittering armlets, pitiful evidence of the manner of woman who had rested alone throughout the years, since the edict of Lili, in this pitiful wooden prison of the dead. How many such pitiful remnants might one find about Beatta if one cared to excavate?

The blacks gave back. The man who had dropped the pick began to speak.

"Mr. Williams," he said, "you is a white man and maybe the curse won't touch you; but I'm glad that it wasn't me that disturbed the dead!"

Softly the blacks, as though someone had given a signal, began to sway in unison. Their eyes never left that pitiful shape in the ravished coffin. A muttering sound went up from many throats, and I knew that the superstitious blacks were fortifying themselves against the fear of the departed, mentally crossing their fingers to scare away the "hant." Just what they would have done had the spell not been broken I can not guess.

But Williams spoke.

"Bosh! The dead can't hurt you—nor me! And to prove it I'll take this skull as a souvenir, and keep it in my tent!"

Dropping the pick, he gathered the pitiful baubles of finger-rings and armlets in one hand, and lifted the skull in the other, carrying it with thumb and forefinger through the eye-holes. Realizing that there would be no more work that day, I gave the word and we began the return to camp.

Williams moved aside until he was close to where the waves broke along the shore, then he raised his hand and hurled the finger-rings and armlets far out into the water. But he carried the grinning skull in his hand.

Lights burned later that night, for the negroes sang hymns after the evening meal. I did not like the hymns which they sang, for they reminded me of those I had heard at funerals. We whites gathered in Williams's tent for a pipe and a chat, and I noticed that Williams had secured the skull to the ridgepole with a piece of string. The wind had arisen with the coming of darkness, and the tent rocked with the force of it, while the skull oscillated back and forth.

I did not like it. But Williams, noting how my eyes clung to the thing, laughed aloud and poked fun at me.

As I returned to my tent to turn in, my heart was heavy again with a nameless foreboding.

I AWOKE in the night with a scream of terror ringing in my ears. It came from the tent of Williams. My hand trembled sadly as I touched the flame of a match to the wick of my lantern. Gordon and Oliver were shivering in their underwear before the closed flap of Williams's tent, afraid to enter, waiting for me to take the initiative.

Taking my courage firmly in hand I undid the flap and entered.

Williams, in his struggles with the unknown, had writhed free of his covering, and now lay sprawled across his cot, his feet touching the floor of his tent. I shall never forget the look of horror on his dead face, nor the gaping wound in his throat where it seemed that the teeth of some savage animal had torn his life out. Red blood dripped from the open wound to stain the coverlets.

Involuntarily my eyes went to that swinging skull. Only it did not swing at the ridgepole now.

I found it in the shadows beyond Williams's bunk, and recoiled in horror when I noted that the grinning mouth was stained with damp crimson.

There was nothing to do but wait for morning. Gordon and Oliver returned slowly and sadly to their tents, while I paused to refasten the flap of the death tent.

Before I entered my tent I lifted my lantern high and looked all around. Just within the circle of light cast by the lantern, between me and the sea to the east, I made out the wavering outlines of a woman! She grinned horribly at me with fleshless lips. She lifted her hands in a mocking gesture and I caught the gleam of brassy rings on her fingers, the false glitter of glass armlets! As I stared, while a chill crept slowly along my body to the roots of my hair, a drop of water slid from one of the armlets and fell to the ground.

I knew the woman at once, for in the lesser known streets of many cities in all parts of the world I have gazed into the haunting eyes of many another of her drab sisterhood.

I took a step toward her and she fled into the night—straight out toward the sea in the darkness to the east. I heard a weird laugh when she had disappeared—a laugh that seemed to fly on the wings of the landborne breeze, whipping past me to die away among the sand dunes in the center of the island. She was gone.

Horror had reached its climax that night. I returned to my tent, and did not close my eyes until morning came.

I know that I would not have pursued that woman into the darkness

for all the gold in Christendom! But with morning came a new horror.

We three whites arose ahead of the negroes, hoping to keep the knowledge of Williams's death from them, for a time at least, and bore the body to the shallow cavern where we had cached the caskets—to find that the driftwood closing the entrance had been ruthlessly hurled aside, and one of the caskets drawn forth from the opening.

The wooden top had been carefully removed, disclosing the metal casket inside—and the metal top had been unscrewed and shifted so that the coffin lay open there, ready to receive the dead body of Williams!

3

We paused aghast. The body of Williams fell from our nerveless hands and slumped soggily to the ground beside the coffin. Who, or what, had opened it in readiness? Not the blacks, for nothing could have driven them from their tents after nightfall, last night especially. Not one of us. What had the mysterious woman had to do with it?

I stooped to the sand about the coffin and searched carefully for marks of feet. There was none. I tried to explain it by telling myself that the waves from the beach might have surged up about the coffin, erasing the marks from the sand. But it was no use. The marks of the highest waves stopped well below the entrance to the cavern where the other two coffins lay, and here could be found only those marks which we ourselves had left.

Could there, after all, be anything in the legend of the restless ghosts of Beatta? I cursed myself for my folly in even entertaining such a thought; yet what had moved the coffin and opened it to receive the dead?

My head was busy with weird imaginings as we lowered the body of Williams into the coffin and screwed home the ponderous lid. How would we explain to the blacks the absence of Williams?

What had killed Williams?

That grinning skull? Impossible! It might, snapping the twine suspending it to the ridgepole, have fallen upon him in such a way that the mouth had struck his throat. But what had caused the dead molars to close in the death grip? Had the force of the falling skull awakened Williams—and had he died of fright at seeing the gruesome thing at his throat? Had that woman in gaudy finery whom I had seen in the circle of light done the slaying? Was she a flesh-and-blood woman? Or—but I refused to pursue this fantastic line of thought. I remembered the drop of water which had fallen from one of the armlets which she had worn, and, remembering this, I recalled that Williams had hurled into the sea the counterpart of this very armlet which we had found in the coffin. Could there be any connection between two such circumstances so widely at variance?

We returned the now occupied coffin to the cavern beside those other two, and came back to camp, to find the blacks washing up for the morning meal.

Some strange idea caused me to precede the others to the scene of the excavation. I was glad, later, that I had done so. I dropped down into the excavation and hurried to the spot where the aged, ravished coffin had lain the night before.

The coffin was just as we had left it, but there was not a single bone left of the skeleton which had so frightened the negroes! There had been plenty of bones yesterday. Where had they gone?

I stooped and ran my fingers through the loose soil under the demolished coffin. They encountered nothing but the newly turned soil.

Then I rubbed my eyes in unbelief, for, leading away from the spot toward our encampment, barely dis-

cernible, I saw the marks of feet which must have fallen as lightly as thistledown. Human feet. But feet that were bare and fleshless. Naked bones of a skeleton! I was close above them, stooping, and when I straightened the prints faded out. I stooped again and saw them. On hands and knees I followed their trace to the edge of the excavation, and saw where a little mound of sand had fallen down as though someone had loosened it in climbing out. I arose to a standing position at the edge and looked over, half expecting to see the marks of bony hands where a skeleton had placed them to assist in the leap. The marks were not there, but those of the feet were, right at the edge, as though the bony figure had leaped—or been wafted—straight into the air and out!

Hurriedly I erased these marks with my hand. As I did so the blacks, headed by the wan-faced Gordon and Oliver, arrived and began to drop into the excavation. One of the negroes, he who had first driven pick into that residue of earth in the corner, looked at me queerly, a little suspiciously.

"What for you come here early, boss?" he demanded.

"I came to gather up this junk and hurl it into the sea," I replied, indicating the spot where the skeleton had been. I complimented myself mentally for my quickness of wit. I was glad that his was slower moving, for had he but looked at the sand he would have known that I lied, as there were no footprints leading seaward.

He dropped heavily into the pit, stooping as he bent to lessen the shock of his fall.

And his eyes fixed suddenly on the ground before him. I knew what he saw. His face turned a slaty gray. I had not rubbed out those faint prints of the bony feet, and the negro had seen one of the marks. But he arose and the print seemed to vanish. He rubbed a black hand over his forehead, a look of puzzlement creasing his brow. He had first driven pick into that aged coffin, and I could read that he was vividly remembering.

The blacks worked that day as I had never seen them work before. They knew that they must carry out their contract with me or receive no money, and as I had not made them a per diem rate they worked far more swiftly than they otherwise would have done. They were anxious to finish the job and be away from haunted Beatta Island. I did not blame them.

By nightfall most of the concrete forms had been fashioned and placed in position. The work was well done, too, and I felt lighthearted for the first time since coming to Beatta. Fear seemed to have removed its hand from the hearts of the blacks—all except the one who had seen that faint mark of the bony foot at the bottom of the excavation. He had scarcely uttered a word all day, and when he had spoken in answer to some order of mine, his tone had been very subdued. I knew that, for him, this night to come would be filled with dread.

It is well that the future is denied to the vision of mortals—for the night to come was to be a night of dread for all of us.

Its beginning was not promising. For as soon as the sun had gone down, black clouds gathered swiftly in the south, rushing toward us from the direction of Curaçao and Venezuela. A strong wind began to set toward us out of the east, as though it were funneling out from the lips of Mona Passage. The waves began to break upon the shingle with menacing roars, drowning out the voices of the blacks in their flapping tents. Most of this eastern coast of Beatta was honeycombed by sea-worn caverns, and the waves rushed savagely into these, drawing back with sullen, awe-inspiring grumbles to renew their attack upon the ageless stone. Wind screeched across the tableland, lifting the sand from the tops of dunes and carrying it away as though it

had been as light as the spume at the crests of breaking waves.

Then the rain began to fall—a steady, torrential downpour. It roared upon our tents, threatening to crush them down with its weight. Ever and anon it paused, as though resting before a new attack, and through these pauses we could hear the roaring of mighty waves in the distant caverns, the moaning of the seas as they returned again. Moans that caused the listener to shiver. Moans that ended in wild, eery shrieks—shrieks that sounded like the concerted laughter of a host of shallow women.

I stepped to the door of my tent and looked out. It was so black outside that I could not see the door of Gordon's tent, the entrance of which faced mine.

But an odd breeze fanned my face—a breeze which I could feel in spite of the rush of the downpouring rain. I knew that someone or something had passed me in the darkness, heading toward the sea to the east.

"Gordon!" I called softly. "Oliver!"

No answer from either.

"I'se right here, boss," came a whisper almost in my face; "it's on'y me, Jamaica!"

I stepped back, and the grizzled face of the old cook peered in through the flap of my tent. As I did not forbid him, he undid the flap and entered.

"Boss," he said seriously, without preamble, "they's strange doin's around here. I wasn't out there when Smith drove his pick into that old coffin, but the others told me all about it. Smith was in my tent tonight after supper and we tried to talk. But somethin' was wrong with him. He on'y half listened to me, an' kep' turnin' his head toward the tent-door as though he was listenin' for somethin'. He was seared stiff about somethin'—face was gray almost—an' his lips kep' movin' as though he was sayin' somethin' to himself. He got up quick-like and went out. I waited for a minute or two and followed him. Boss, he didn't go to his tent! He went past here this very minute, headin' toward the sea—an' I was afraid to foller him further than your tent. An' say, boss, where's Mr. Williams gone to?"

I felt that I could tell this old darky the truth; felt that he could be depended upon.

"Jamaica," I said, "Mr. Williams is dead. Something or somebody killed him last night!"

I saw the old man's limbs begin to tremble, but his eyes looked squarely into mine. Spiritually he was braver than his fellows.

"Boss," he quavered, "does you think Charlie Smith killed him?"

This idea had never occurred to me. Why should it? But what was he doing abroad now? Something stronger than superstitious fear had driven him forth into the raging night.

I buckled my holster on without making answer to the old man, and lowered the hammer upon a live cartridge—something I never do with an automatic, proof of the tension under which my mind was laboring.

I stepped out into the night, noting only that the tents of the other two whites were dark before I set out from the camp. The brave old darky, Jamaica, followed close at my heels, and I was glad of his company.

I stopped when I discovered that my eyes were not equal to the darkness, and spoke hurriedly to the old negro, who unhesitatingly took the lead. I sensed that the chase led toward the excavation.

The rain stopped before we reached the works, and for a few minutes a yellow moon looked down upon Beatta—for a few minutes only, through a rift in the sullen clouds which were gathering swiftly again to discharge their contents; but it was long enough for me to see a terrible sight.

For we stood looking down into the excavation. In its center was Charlie Smith, the shirt torn away from his black chest. Snarls that might have issued from some brute beast came from his lips and, his huge fists clenched into knotted balls, he was striking, flailing, feinting—his breath coming forth in labored gasps, while he fought there as though he battled against a multitude.

Yet there wasn't a soul in that pit except Charlie Smith himself! I watched him spellbound, wondering what terrors he imagined himself battling. He stopped, finally, leaning panting against one of the concrete forms, his eyes fastened upon the spot where that aged coffin had lain. Then his eyes popped open wide and his head turned as though he watched the measured approach of something we could not see. In my imagination I could see it too, a formless wraith that arose from the ground and crossed the floor of the excavation, passing near Charlie Smith and oozing up the side of the pit.

Charlie Smith turned wearily and followed the unseen something out of the pit, and away toward the sea to the east. I heard him mutter distinctly, "Lordy! Lordy! I'se comin'! Don't stare at me like that!"

Jamaica and I fell in behind him, and he did not seem to see us. Just above the surge of the waves he turned to the right, his eyes still fixed, apparently, upon something that moved on ahead of him. What was it? I did not see it, so I can not say; but from the set look on the face of the negro I knew that it must be something ghastly.

Fifteen minutes, or more, we followed Charlie Smith. He was skirting the edge of the cliffs now, southward of where we had cached the three coffins. Then he paused suddenly and his eyes turned slowly out to sea, as though whatever he had been following had suddenly taken wings. He turned toward the sea, and before I could guess his intention he had taken a step forward. Arms wide flung, he dropped out of sight, while the shout which would have issued from my lips died in my throat. I hurried forward in time to see the waves break over his mangled body below, well out from the cliff. When the waves had given back to the sea, the body was gone, claimed by the resistless might of the Caribbean.

Up to where I stood, apparently from the shadows at the base of the cliff, came the throaty laugh of a woman! I searched the shadows with my eyes and could see nothing. Almost at once the laugh came again, far down the coast—from such a distance that I knew, had it been a living woman, she could not have moved so swiftly.

I turned about and ran with all my speed back to the encampment. Jamaica was right at my heels, too.

I ran to Gordon's tent and shouted to him. He answered sleepily, and I bade him rise and dress at once. Whatever was going on here, I refused to believe it the work of restless spirits, and I meant to investigate. But not alone!

I went to the tent of Oliver and shouted to him. No answer. I procured the lantern from my own tent and entered Oliver's. It was empty, the covers on the bed thrown aside as though Oliver had risen in haste. Where had he gone?

Gordon joined me, and we returned to the spot where Charlie Smith had stepped off to his death. On the way I explained what had happened on my previous visit. We skirted the cliff, Gordon carrying my lantern in his hand. We stopped about where I had heard the laugh and looked about for footprints, finding none.

"Nothing doing," said Gordon softly. "Now to see what has become of Oliver."

He would have said more, but at the moment he finished the sentence a rasping sound came to us from just

to the north—a sound as of a rusty nail being drawn forth from stout wood.

My heart was heavy with dread as we hurried toward the cavern where we had cached the coffins. Its mouth, which we had closed a second time after placing Williams to rest, was open again!

Inside were the three coffins, just as we had left them.

But were they? Raising my lantern high I studied the center coffin carefully, and saw that the nails which secured the wooden cover had been drawn almost wholly forth, loosening the lid.

I breathed a sigh of relief, glad that we had arrived before that second coffin had been drawn out upon the sand. It would be well to see, however, just how far the unknown agency had gone before our approach had scared it away.

The lid lifted easily and dropped into the sand beside the coffin.

A chill struck me as I saw that the screws in the metal lid beneath had also been tampered with. Feverishly Gordon and I knelt and completed the job of releasing that lid.

When we flung it back at last we found ourselves gazing into the set face of Oliver—dead in the coffin there, his head bashed in as though a great stone had been dropped upon it!

Speechless, I turned to stare into the face of Gordon. His eyes were fixed in horror upon the dead face of Oliver; his right hand was slowly making the sign of the cross before his own body.

Finally he turned to look at me. His lips moved and I caught the words which issued from his lips—words that came in a barely audible whisper: "Remember the joking prophecy of Williams, Carver? He has been right so far!"

Slowly he turned and gazed down at the third coffin. Slowly his arm upraised as he pointed.

"Something tells me, Carver, that I shall soon be resting in that one!"

4

Gordon had completely lost his nerve. This was very evident next day when word got around of the deaths of Williams and Oliver. Gordon was listless with his work and his face was as drawn and yellow as faded parchment.

The blacks had called roll among themselves and had noted with superstitious fear that there were thirteen of us left in the party. Unlucky number, unlucky almost since the origin of numbers. I heard them muttering among themselves, asking of one another who would fill the third coffin. Two blacks had disappeared since the departure from Barahona; two whites had gone the way of no returning. Would the next one be white or black? Gordon was always quavering that he knew in his soul he was fated to fill that third coffin. He said it so often that the blacks began to think he was possessed of prophetic vision. I suppose that in their hearts they prayed that he might be right. Intense gloom hung over the encampment on Beatta. But the blacks worked at top speed.

I was thinking deeply. I had known when leaving Barahona that *El Presidente*, fleet yacht of the republic's chief executive, was due to visit these waters shortly for a few days of turtle fishing. It would put in at Beatta, or always had done so heretofore—would certainly do so now so that the president could make an inspection and see how well I was carrying out my contract with the Dominican government.

Knowing this when leaving Barahona, I had planned to return on her to the capital to arrange for a checking account with the International Banking Corporation, leaving the work in the hands of the three whites. But two of them were dead, and the third, Gordon, had lost his nerve.

"Why are you niggers fretting over the fact that we number thirteen? Don't you know that the third coffin is reserved for me?"

The next day after the death of Oliver I'll wager that Gordon made that remark at least a dozen times. A croaking raven. Nerveless. Superstitious even as the negroes were superstitious.

I dreaded for night to come again. Gordon dreaded it with a dread that was ghastly to witness. The negroes glanced up at the sun as it sailed into the west, no doubt wishing that, like Joshua, they might cause it to stand still.

It was very evident that I could not return to the capital on *El Presidente*. She would be due tomorrow or the next day. Could I prevent the negroes from boarding her? The president would have a military bodyguard and I foresaw that I might even be compelled to beg their aid in keeping my blacks upon the island.

Then night came, as different from last night as could well be imagined. The stars were shining like jewels in the sky. The air was dank and sultry —Californians would call it earthquake weather. And the silence could almost be felt. Even the murmur of the waves upon the shingle was muted, as though they whispered quaint secrets. The waves that came in were oily and did not break. One could see clear across the tableland of Beatta's crest. Hummocks of wind-worn rocks stood out like weird ghosts—silent ghosts that waited for something to happen. That was it—an air of weird expectancy!

The lights burned long in the tents of the negroes that night. I remained awake until after midnight, reading a book I had brought with me. I could hear the subdued murmuring of the negroes—murmurs that were weighted with dread and expectancy —always expectancy—waiting for a new horror to descend. But the silence held.

Yawning, at last I threw off my clothes and crawled under the covers; then threw them off again impatiently, because of the sultriness which still held sway over Beatta.

Then I slept.

When I awoke it was still dark, still silent. Lights were out in the tents of the negroes. Murmurs had been stilled by the hand of sleep.

What had awakened me? Why this feeling of horror that obsessed me upon awaking? Down in my heart I knew that something had happened to add to the horrors already experienced. I threw on my clothes and stepped to the tent of Gordon.

When I found it empty I was not surprized. This had been fated from the beginning. Had Gordon gone the way of the others?

In doubt as to which way he had gone, I stepped away from the camp and began to cast a wide circle about it. I found his footprints at last. I heaved a sigh of relief when I saw that they did not lead in the direction of the third coffin, but away across Beatta toward the west. I searched the tableland with my eyes and could see nothing that moved.

A chill had now begun to make itself felt. The night was still bright, proof that dawn was yet a long way off. A bluish sort of haze hung close to the ground, defining strangely the shapes on Beatta which appeared above the level of the island's crest.

I was afraid to follow those footprints into the west!

I called softly to old Jamaica, and he joined me at once, fully clothed. He had turned in with all his clothes on. Had the old man been lying there in his tent expecting my call?

We began to follow those prints. We followed them for two hours. And as we strode through the sand our feet ever and anon kicked up odd things from the ground. Bones! But whether human or animal we never paused to ascertain.

The trail ended at the very edge of a high cliff which looks into the south toward Alta Vela and that island's little sister, Alto Velito. We could just make out the odd shape of Los Frailes across the water—that weird island which looks like a submarine rising from the deep.

There were no steps returning, and deep water lapped at the cold stones far below our feet. Gordon had gone. In my heart I did not blame him. Rather than face the menace of the third coffin he had taken the easier way out—going far to do it out of consideration for the blacks and for me.

This was my thought, and it made me feel infinitely better. I waved my hand toward the water below, mute farewell to a brother white man. Then we two, Jamaica and I, turned about to retrace our steps. As we turned I gazed toward the scrub which grows on top of the hill directly opposite Alta Vela, and for a moment I fancied I caught the movement of a white garment against the bluish shadow of the stunted forest—as though a spying woman had darted in among the trees. But I set it down to disordered imagination.

Gordon had gone, and we were twelve.

When we again entered the encampment I caught the gleam of bobbing lights across the water to the east and knew that *El Presidente* was ahead of schedule, coming in toward the island at half-speed. It would be daylight before she would anchor. I went to bed again and slept until morning.

I rowed out to her next morning to pay my respects to the president. He was cordial in his greetings, complimented me on the progress already made, and promised to anchor again for an hour or two before his return to the capital. But he did not go ashore.

I remained aboard until the vessel weighed anchor for the short trip along the coast toward Jacmel. It would be back in three days. And during those three days my men worked like so many black beavers. The prison walls arose by leaps and bounds, surpassing my rosiest expectations. The blacks had regained their usual good spirits. The ghosts of Beatta had, apparently, been laid with the passing of Gordon.

It was dusk of the fourth morning when *El Presidente* again anchored offshore from our camp. And just in time, for a wind broke with apalling fury. I had no fear for the safety of the craft. She was on a lee shore and was stout enough to ride out a regular hurricane, into which the blow threatened to develop before morning.

The night was even worse than that during which Williams had been slain. All the superstitious fear of the negroes came back. Their cries, prayers and exhortations never abated until the sun came up out of the east. And when it rose, they came to me in a body, begging for leave to go aboard the yacht and return with her to Barahona, where the president intended to touch en route to the capital. When I refused they became sullen. Their spokesman threatened, in the name of the men, to take the small boats and go aboard anyway. I had to do something, and more to secure an opportunity for planning than anything else, I promised to row out and put the whole thing up to the president.

I was really surprized when he did not laugh at the whole story which I told him. He bowed his head in thought. After all, thought I, this man was a Dominican, and though an educated man, even he might put some stock in the curse which seemed to hang over Beatta.

"Tell you what, Mr. Carver," he said at length; "these three coffins are the cause of the whole thing. Put

them aboard and we'll take care of the matter of returning the two bodies to the families in the United States. And it might be a good idea, at that, to take the whole crew of you into Barahona with us. There will be a big *fiesta* there tomorrow, which the blacks would perhaps like to attend. I am breaking up my fishing-trip to honor the affair with my presence for a few hours and I intend to return anyway. Go up and back with us and I'll wager that, once away from Beatta for awhile, the blacks will forget the whole gruesome happenings and be quite willing to return to their work. Leave your camp as it is."

I was a bit dubious of this, but the president was wise in the ways of his people and might be counseling well. I agreed, and the blacks shouted their delight when I returned and informed them what the president had said. Every last man of them promised to return to Beatta whenever I said the word. The negro will promise anything to gain his point.

When we heaved anchor and scudded gracefully away from Beatta Island, the three coffins were in the hold. The two which held the bodies were plainly marked so that even the most ignorant stevedores could not mistake them. The third coffin was slightly apart from the others.

I looked back at the framework of the prison I had contracted to build, and something told me I would never return to complete it. I could not explain the premonition. It weighted my heart as though with lead, for the agent of the president who gave contracts in the name of the government held a fat check of mine which would go to the government if I did not live up to my contract. It would ruin my credit throughout the islands, for the International Bank had loaned me that money on the strength of its belief in my ability to produce results.

We slid in along the dock at Barahona before noon of the next day, having anchored for three hours off Enriquillo while the president went ashore to look around.

I went at once to the *iduana* and looked up Lieutenant Wilson. I told him bitterly of all that had befallen me. He was the personification of sympathy.

"Thank God, Wilson," I said, "we had no need of the third coffin! Come down to the dock and I'll turn it over to you."

My blacks rolled a handcar down along the dock tracks and brought it to pause beside *El Presidente*. I went aboard to supervise the unloading of the grim wooden box. The negroes carried it from the hold to the deck. And they joked about it as though all those horrors on Beatta had never been. It raised my spirits, for it made me think that the president had been wise indeed.

They fixed the huge rope sling under the coffin, adjusted the windlass, lifted the coffin high above the deck and out over the dock. The windlass halted with a jerk as its operator judged the location of the handcar upon which it was to be deposited.

That sudden jerk was a terrible blow to all my newborn plans, for the rotten rope about the coffin broke. The windlass man shouted a warning to the men who waited below. These sprang free with the agility of monkeys. The huge coffin, weighing more than five hundred pounds when empty, dropped like a plummet, crashing full tilt against the edge of the handcar.

That coffin must indeed have rested long in the cryptlike room beneath the *iduana*, giving the ants of the tropics time to get in their devastating work, for the rotten wooden outer covering of the coffin smashed into kindling wood and the metal coffin fell free; the metal lid, unscrewed, slid into the waters of Neiba Bay!

I found myself staring in stark horror upon the dead white face of Gordon! His head, even as Oliver's, had been beaten in with a stone!

Ghastly realization came to me as I noted that the feet of Gordon were unshod—bare white things there in the coffin!

Who, or what, had walked across bleak Beatta that night in Gordon's shoes?

When I was able to raise horrified eyes from that terrible figure in the coffin below, I saw that my maddened negroes were in full flight up the dock toward Barahona. They disappeared up the street running west from the *iduana*, and I never saw them again.

I had failed miserably. Never would I again be able to recruit labor to complete that prison on Beatta; for, knowing Santo Domingo, I was sure that the story would be all over the republic within the space of three days. The blacks would see to that.

It was a mighty silent and thoughtful man, I can tell you, who voyaged on into the capital aboard *El Presidente*.

THREE months ago I again gazed upon Beatta, from the sea. I was aboard a United States government tug, en route to Guantanamo Bay. The skipper was garrulous. He knew Santo Domingo and the legends of the country. I had been bored to death with his tiresome narratives, all of which were too replete with personal pronouns. But when we were in the blue water between Alta Vela and Beatta he pointed to a thatched hut on the shore of Beatta, just below that memorable forest of scrub trees, and told me a story that brought me to mute attention.

"There is a story to that island, young man, let me tell you! It is said to be haunted by the ghosts of wild women sent there by Lili to die. It seems that the government wanted to build a prison there a year or so ago and gave the contract to a credulous young American who, of course, was required to deposit a heavy bond. The man who handled government contracts couldn't stand the pressure of all that money in his hand, so he decided to force the young fellow to forfeit the coin. How to do it? He made the ghosts on the island do it, aided by his own mistress, who, with two Dominican soldiers, occupied that hut you see right across there. She pulled off a bunch of hocus-pocus on the island, I've been told. And the English negroes, through an old reprobate known as Jamaica, were induced to come in on the deal—all except two of them, who were conveniently put out of the way. Two or three white men were bumped off, too, they tell me. Lot of gossip about three coffins, but I don't remember the whole of that part of the story. Spooky-looking place, ain't it, Mr. Carver? Carver, Carver—seems to me that was the name of the young fellow they bamboozled. Ever hear of him?"

"No!" I shouted.

"Well, don't get sore about it! I'm just telling you the story. There must be some truth in it, too. For after we have passed that high cliff yonder you can look back over the tableland of the island and see the remains of the prison, which was never finished. Stay up here on the bridge with me and I'll point it out to you."

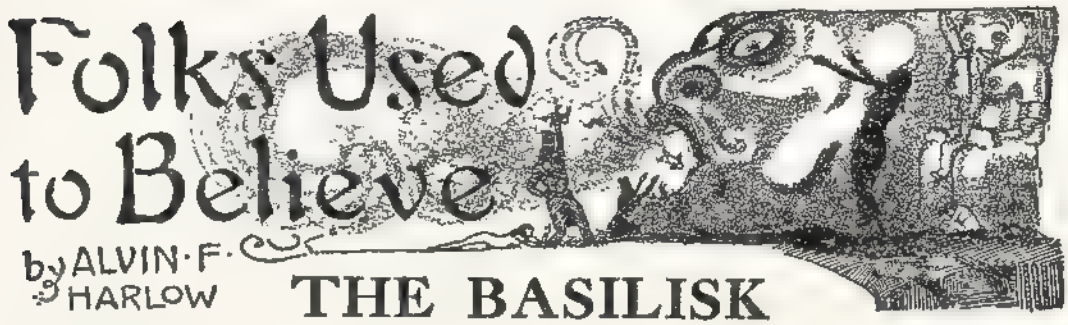
But when we had passed the cliff to which he referred, and which I remembered so well, I was down in the wardroom, deeply immersed in a book—not one word of which I remember.

The whole thing explained at last.

But I couldn't help wondering what had come over Charlie Smith that night. Wondered what he had thought himself battling there in that excavation. Wondered who or what he thought himself following as he

walked over that other cliff to his death in the waters of the Caribbean. This much at least has never been explained—unless he was one of those Jamaica had not won over, and had gone off his head with superstitious fear.

But I don't like to think that. Not only does it make my blood boil with anger at the man who had mulcted me—a man who had since been slain by one of his mistresses—but it makes me doubt my own spiritual courage in the face of the unknown.



THE BASILISK

THE malignant eye of the basilisk has passed into a proverb, as something enticing, yet deadly. Authorities in ancient times differed as to whether the basilisk was more like a serpent, lizard or dragon. All agreed that it was comparatively small, yet very dangerous.

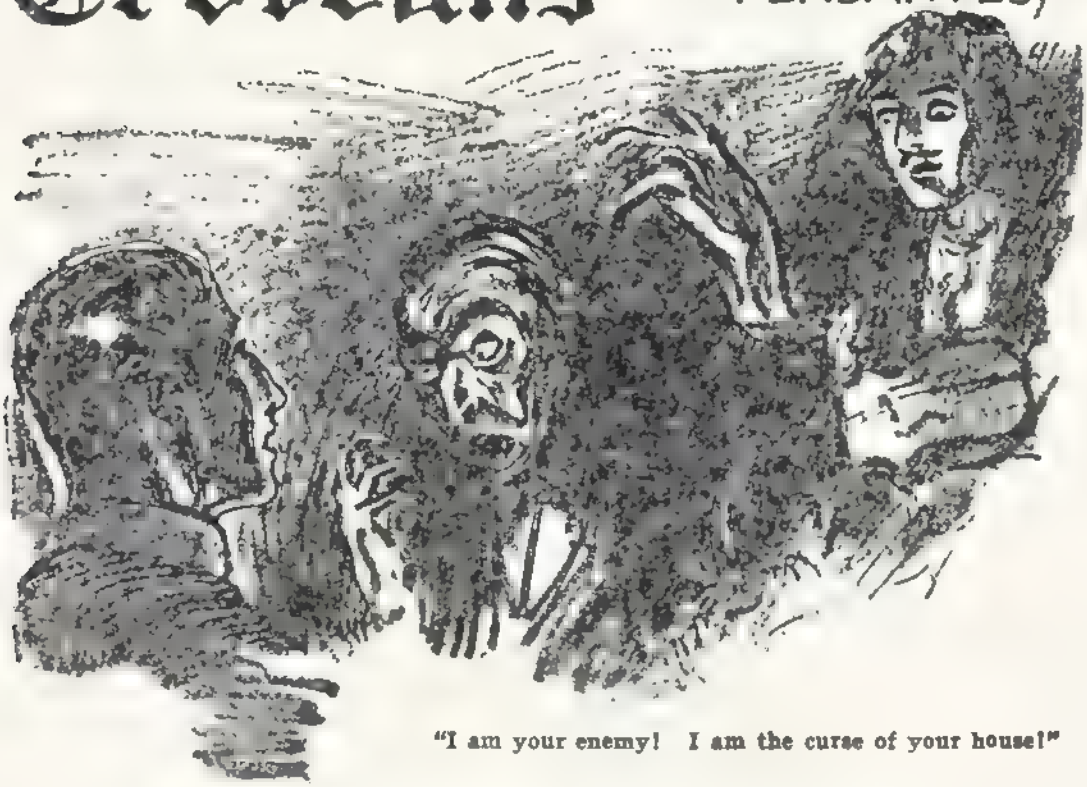
Pliny, the Roman naturalist of the First Century, said of it, "All who behold its eyes fall dead upon the spot. It is produced in the province of Cyrene, and is not more than twelve fingers in length. A white spot or star it carries on the head, and sets it out like a coronet or diadem. When it hisses, all other serpents fly from it; and it does not advance its body like the others, by a succession of folds, but moves along, erect and upright, upon the middle. It destroys all shrubs, not only by its contact, but those even that it has breathed upon; it burns up all the grass, too, and breaks stones, so tremendous is its noxious influence. It was formerly a general belief that if a man on horseback killed one of these animals with a spear, the poison would run up the weapon and kill not only the rider but the horse as well. To this dreadful monster the effluvium of the weasel is fatal, a thing that has often been tried with success, for kings have often desired to see its body when killed; so true is it that it has pleased Nature that there should be nothing without its antidote. The weasel is thrown into the burrow of the basilisk, which is easily known from the soil around it being infected. The weasel destroys the basilisk by its odor, but dies itself in this struggle of Nature against its own self."

In later centuries it was claimed that the weasel could not kill the basilisk until after it had eaten some of the herb called rue. The basilisk was said to be dreadfully afraid of the weasel, and would flee at sight of it.

A genus of ugly South American lizardlike reptiles has been named Basilisk because of a sort of hood or pouch at the back of the head supposed to resemble the fabulous basilisk's "diadem."

The Doomed Treveans

by G. G. PENDARVES



"I am your enemy! I am the curse of your house!"

"I LOOK to you, Fremling, to protect the boy!" The words came slowly and feebly as Gareth Trevean fixed brilliant, fevered eyes on his old friend's face. "I have only another day to live at the outside, and I shall go in peace if I know you are here with Humphrey. Promise me you'll stay!"

"I'll stay, of course," was the quiet assurance, and Trevean lay back on his pillows and put out a thin hand to clasp Fremling's.

"I'll tell you all I can . . . you can verify it from the old manuscripts and family records at your leisure."

"It won't hurt you to talk so much?"

"No, it will ease my mind to tell *you* . . . you will understand! Other people would either laugh, or be afraid. You know . . . you can understand," repeated the sick man.

"It began in the Sixteenth Century," he continued, after a brief pause. "A certain Humphrey Trevean of those times had for a neighbor a man called Jabez Penhale, a wizened old recluse, who scared the life out of the simple country-folk by his experiments and learning. Penhale was known throughout the duchy of Cornwall as the 'Wise Man

of St. Neot,' and was reckoned as cunning and dangerous as Old Nick himself."

Trevean drank thirstily from a goblet at his side, then continued:

"This Penhale was rich, very much richer than my ancestor. Legend has it that he knew how to coin his blood into gold! This wealth won for him the bonniest girl in the whole countryside as his promised bride. The girl herself was in love with Humphrey Trevean—a gay, adventurous gallant, with eyes as blue as the Cornish seas; and he loved her, but the girl's father sold her to old Penhale for a thousand golden guineas.

"The day before the marriage Humphrey eloped with the girl, and Jabez Penhale swore a terrible oath of vengeance. He laid a curse on every blue-eyed heir of the Treveans that should be born, and vowed that he himself would never rest in this world—or the next—until the name of Trevean was wiped out and forgotten."

"Yes?" prompted Fremling.

"It has been so," was the answer. "Four times since then a blue-eyed Trevean has fallen heir to the Lamorna estates, and four times he has died on reaching his majority. Humphrey, my son, is the last of them. The last of all the Treveans . . . and his eyes are blue . . . blue as the Cornish seas!"

"And when—when?"

"He will be twenty-one next week," answered the father. "You must be here with him, Fremling! I trust you to find a way out . . . to defeat this curse—this hate that has pursued us through the centuries. Why should Humphrey—my son, my dear son—why should he have to suffer?"

2

"VERY strange—most strange and arresting!" murmured Sir Donald Fremling to himself as he looked up from the records which lay on the old writing-table in front of him, and gazed out through the window by which he sat. His dark eyes gleamed beneath their shaggy eyebrows as he watched the distant, shimmering sea, and his pale, ascetic face was sternly set.

"This is certainly more than mere coincidence," he ruminated, turning back to the papers spread beneath his nervous, sensitive hands. "He appears to have been extraordinary in every way, and therefore his hate was not a thing to be lightly incurred. The hate of such a man would be likely to pursue its object in life . . . and even after life . . . even through the centuries! Time . . . the flesh . . . this little world of ours . . . all delusion, all shadows, dreams within a dream!"

The heavy paneled door of the library was opened and a young man entered. His body was strong and well-knit, his face tanned by sun and wind, but his expression was sober beyond his years—his eyes brooding and melancholy. He crossed over to Fremling and sat down under the open lattice-window by the older man.

"Got all the cheerful little story by this time, sir?" asked the newcomer, a crooked smile twisting his mouth.

"Yes, it's a very well-preserved account, Humphrey," was the answer. "This Jabez Penhale appears to have been a truly remarkable person—one of those supermen who stride across the world's stage at rare intervals. He was born too soon, though . . . centuries too soon! Even now people would reject his theories with the greatest fury and contempt. In another five hundred years perhaps——"

Humphrey Trevean's sea-blue eyes met Fremling's squarely. "And how do you suppose his curse can affect me?" he asked.

"In proportion to your belief in that curse," was the reply.

Humphrey's eyes mirrored his astonishment.

"But—but——!" he stammered. "Don't you believe in it? . . . don't you believe our family is haunted by it? . . .that—that——"

"It's your belief that has made the whole thing possible! Your faith, and the faith of those dead Treveans has enabled your enemy's hate to endure!"

"But they have died!" protested the boy. "All those Treveans—the blue-eyed Treveans have died by the curse!"

"Yes, they have died by the curse," assented his companion.

"Well, then! How can I help believing in it?"

"If you had never known of it, never been taught its power, never had your imagination saturated with it from your earliest childhood, the curse of your house would have been utterly powerless to harm you. As it is——"

"Yes, go on!" begged Humphrey, his frowning young face intent, his hands thrust deep in the pockets of his old shooting-jacket.

"As it is, the curse is in your blood, woven into the very spirit and fiber of you, poisoning the marrow of your bones, every nerve and tissue and sinew of your body. You have lived and breathed this curse so long that it is no longer possible to ignore it. You must meet it now—meet it face to face!"

"Face to face!" breathed the other, his tanned face slowly whitening. "But how shall I know when it *does* face me? What is it? . . . what in God's name *is* it?"

Fremling looked with the deepest compassion and understanding at young Trevean.

"I can't tell you that—at least not now!" said the older man simply, rising to put his hand on the other's shoulder. "You don't stand alone; remember, there will be two of us to fight!"

"If only I knew in what direction the danger lies!" The boy's hands clenched on the carved eagles' heads which formed the arms of his seat.

"There is much more I must investigate during the next few days," replied Sir Donald, turning again to the open window and watching the evening mists drift across the sea and intervening valley. "Now that your father's funeral is over, you must take me round the Lamorna estates, introduce me to your tenants, and to all the villagers of St Neot, to everyone—man, woman, and child—that you meet in your daily life here!"

Humphrey shrugged his broad shoulders.

"Just simply country-folk, sir; no one to interest you or help in any investigations." And he dismissed the village of St. Neot with a gesture.

Fremling's deep eyes twinkled at the youthful assertion.

"I don't find country people more simple than the city ones, as a rule," he commented. "Less sophisticated—but not less observant and shrewd."

"There is one fellow in this sleepy place worth talking to!" admitted the other. "The doctor—chap called Carne—is quite interesting. He's learnt a good deal outside his own particular line, traveled and read and met a whole lot of out-of-the-way people. He spent a few years as ship's surgeon before settling down to a practise."

Fremling watched the young man's kindling face with interest.

"How long has he been here?"

"Oh, about a year now. He came down as *locum* when Dr. Mudge was ill, and when the old fellow died, he took over the practise permanently."

3

"THERE'S Carne coming toward us!" exclaimed Humphrey

He and Sir Donald Fremling were taking the cliff-path toward the little village on the following afternoon, walking amidst a glory of golden gorse and purple heather, while the salt sea thundered and foamed far below them. Trevean walked with face tilted toward the singing wind, and he looked happier and more animated than Fremling had seen him.

"Hullo, Trevean!" was the doctor's greeting as he approached. "Forgetting your troubles for once, eh?"

At his words, the boy's look clouded suddenly, and he presented the newcomer to his companion with all the youth wiped out of his face.

Dr. Carne was a thin, emaciated, bloodless type of man, who looked as though his energy had been exhausted by the severest intellectual toil. Even his pale, flickering eyes appeared faded by overmuch use of midnight oil, and his thin lips revealed an iron endurance and self-control.

Here was a man whose body was a fine—almost transparent—sheath for the terribly eager, terribly alive soul within.

By common consent the three sat down to rest and talk awhile in the sunny sheltered hollow where they had met.

"I'm glad that Trevean has kept you with him," remarked the doctor, as he lit a long black cheroot and darted a quick, birdlike glance at Humphrey. "Perhaps you can persuade him to forget some of the old family history he wears like chains about his neck."

"I am staying with him over his coming of age," was Fremling's reply. "I hope that when next Friday is safely passed——"

"Thursday!" interrupted Carne quickly.

"Ah, Thursday is it?" answered Fremling, his eyes on the heaving waters.

"Why, you know that my——!" began Humphrey, but Fremling did not let him finish.

"I'm getting old and absent-minded," was the latter's gentle apology. "You have no faith in the power of a curse, Dr. Carne?"

"I confess that I see nothing save coincidence in the 'blue-eyed Trevean' tales. They all died in perfectly natural ways; there's no denying that fact."

"I've not heard yet how these former heirs of Lamorna did meet their ends," and Fremling turned to Humphrey. "If you——"

"All right, might as well get the thing off my chest!" answered the boy. "Carne and I have argued this thing until he knows the story by heart; he's pretty well fed up with it."

"Not a bit!" protested the doctor, his thin cheeks drawn in as he smoked vigorously. "Go ahead, my boy; I shall be immensely interested to hear what Sir Donald Fremling has to say about it—immensely interested!"

The latter sat with his old briar between his teeth, his quiet eyes fixed on some distant point on the shimmering horizon.

Humphrey threw away a half-smoked cigarette and lit another with abrupt, nervous movements.

"Of course all the—the *accidents* occurred here in St. Neot, sir!" he began. "Once in every century a blue-eyed Trevean has been born heir to the Lamorna estates, and that Trevean has always died on the day he reached his majority. The first tragedy was in 1500. The affair is recorded in detail by a priest who was part of the household in those old days. I'll tell you briefly——"

"I prefer to have the details," said Fremling.

"Well, the story is that the Humphrey Trevean of those days—the eldest son is always a Humphrey—went down to the shore on the evening of his twenty-first birthday. His father and brothers were with him, for the family was intensely superstitious, and the legend of the curse had been carefully preserved. They had gone down to welcome kinsmen arriving in boats from the Scilly Isles for the birthday feast, and were walking in single file along the narrow cliff-path when the thing happened. A sharp-pointed piece of rock from an over-hanging ledge fell like a meteor as Humphrey passed, crushing his head to a pulp! The priest sums up the event in his manuscript with the words: *'so commenceth the Curse to work, nor hath wisdom, nor piety, nor gold prevailed to protect the innocent.'* "

"It is very evident that the Sixteenth Century Treveans expected the curse to fall on them," said Sir Donald, as the narrator paused. "They feared it, waited for it, prepared their minds for it by morbid memories."

"Fear and memories are hardly agents that would move solid rock, are they?" put in Dr. Carne.

"Faith can remove mountains," quoted Fremling half to himself. "Why should not faith in a curse—in the hate which prompted the curse, rather—why should it not move a piece of rock? Faith is the agent that controls the whole universe."

"Do you mean that old Jabez trotted up from the infernal regions to take a pot-shot at Trevean?" was the doctor's smiling question.

"Yes," was the surprizing answer. "Not so literally as your words imply, but the essence of your remark is true. These rocks are ironstone, and do not break or crumble off. The accident was not natural—it was supernatural!"

His companions stared in silence, Humphrey with an awakened look on his face, and Carne with bitter scorn in his eyes.

"Let's have the next fairy-tale," was the latter's jibe.

"THE Seventeenth Century victim was a great swimmer," continued Humphrey. "He was famous even at a time when most Cornishmen were mighty wrestlers or swimmers. The sea was his playmate, and he was safer on her broad bosom than most men are on the solid earth. He was almost amphibious, and yet he was drowned! In broad day, with the water lying like green satin in the shadow of the cliffs, he was caught in a great mass of drifting weed and held till he drowned. There were others with him in the water, for it was the dreaded day with the Treveans, and the heir was closely guarded. But none could push their way through that mass of sea-weed to his aid. They saw him fight like a lion, while the long ribbons of weed coiled about his throat and arms, crept and slipped their shining lengths about his great body faster than he could fling them off. Half the villagers were in the water before the fight was over, but none of them could pass through the tangled weed to his aid; and at last he shouted in a voice that rang like a trumpet across the bay: 'The Curse! . . . 'tis the Curse!' and he went down choking as the moving weed closed over his mouth."

"Is the seaweed thick along this coast?" asked Fremling.

"Hardly a trace of it," answered Humphrey. "No man has been known to be caught in it before or since!"

"All done by faith!" murmured Carne, with a sly look at Fremling's intent face.

"Yes," said the latter. "And after that, Humphrey?"

"The next blue-eyed heir was born in 1775," went on Trevean. "He

was a delicate child, and the curse-legend apparently made a deep impression on his mind. He was a nervous, dreamy sort of chap—wrote and painted a good deal, and the theme of nearly all his work was the family curse. He did a big oil-painting of the drowning of the former heir. I'll show it to you later if you like!

"Well, it came to him, as it came to all of them, on his twenty-first birthday! He refused to guard himself, for he said there was no escaping it, and he'd rather die than live in the shadow of the curse any longer. He was a very gloomy, unhappy man by the time he came of age.

"Like all the Treveans, he loved animals, and on the fatal day he climbed down the cliff in order to rescue a puppy that had fallen over and caught in the brambles. It was not a dangerous climb, and he was almost back in safety when an eagle attacked him furiously, pecking at his eyes and beating him in the face with its tremendous wings. He hadn't a chance against the vicious creature, for his hands were occupied, and he lost his footing and fell, breaking his neck on the rocks below."

"Eagles are not native to Cornwall!"

"Never been seen here before or since, any more than the weed!" replied Humphrey bitterly.

"A stone — a weed — a bird!" Fremling's quiet voice was slow and meditative. "Yes, it would happen so."

The doctor's pale eyes darted a lightning glance at the speaker's absorbed face, then he frowned.

"You see some connection?" he asked.

"Undoubtedly." Fremling turned to the boy. "Don't let us interrupt you; there is one more before your time, Humphrey."

"Yes, one more. My great-grandfather was the last—the Nineteenth Century victim of the curse. It was a horse that killed him!

"His father had bought the animal to give to the heir on his birthday. It had cost a small fortune, and had been trained in very famous stables before it was brought to Lamorna House, and had a reputation in the countryside for its perfect temper and gentle manners as well as its marvelous speed.

"When Humphrey went with his father to see the animal, a little crowd was standing round, patting and stroking its glossy sides, giving it sugar, and making it show its paces.

"The moment Humphrey entered the stable-yard, the horse pricked up its ears and its eyes turned red with fury. With a horrible screaming neigh it made a leap, every tooth in its head bared, and its hoofs pawing the air. Before the horrified crowd or his frantic father could help him, Humphrey was a mere pulp of blood and broken bone—the horse dancing on him like a thing possessed!

"They shot the beast, of course, but it was too late: the curse had worked once more."

A long silence fell. The roar of the surf and the long-drawn hiss of the receding waves on the shingly beach below sounded suddenly ominous and threatening; the wind had veered to the east, and the sun was veiled by gathering clouds.

Sir Donald sat as still as if he were part of the rock which supported him, but his eyes under their heavy brows were piercingly bright and alert.

The doctor watched him covertly, until a half-inch of ash dropped from his cheroot and powdered his waistcoat.

"This late fatality fits in with your theories?" the doctor inquired at last, flicking away the ash with long, bony fingers.

"Entirely," answered Fremling. "It had to be either a horse or a dog! Both have lived so close to man that their intelligence is highly developed."

"This is too subtle for me, altogether!" sneered Carne.

"I'm afraid I don't understand, either," said Humphrey. "I wish I did. I'd give anything not to feel so much in the dark."

"Don't you realize the gathering power in these manifestations?" came the quiet, measured voice. "Each victim of his hate has helped Jabez Penhale to manifest that hate! A rock—a weed—a bird—a horse! You see how he strikes through a higher form of life each time!"

"And this last time!" Humphrey's voice sank almost to a whisper. "What—what form will it take?"

Fremling rose to his feet, knocking out his pipe against a ledge of rock.

"The highest type of animal is man, I believe," he answered, his eyes intent on a distant fleet of trawlers. "Although that is difficult to believe sometimes."

"There you are, Trevean! Everything cut and dried for you now! All you have to do is to arm yourself with a revolver, and be ready to shoot any suspicious characters when Thursday comes!"

Carne was shaken with his laughter as he got to his feet. "I must be getting along to my patients," he said abruptly, and without another word he turned on his heel and struck up across the heather, his long, thin, darkly clad figure strangely out of harmony with the glowing carpet spread under his hasty feet.

4

DINNER—Humphrey's twenty-first dinner party—was drawing to a close. He, and his friend the doctor, with Sir Donald Fremling, composed the party, and it had been, superficially at least, a cheerful one! The cloud which hung over the house had been ignored, for Fremling—savant, mystic, traveler, and polished man of the world—had steered the conversation skilfully, and Humphrey's eyes had lost much of their hunted look within the last hour.

Not until they rose from the ancient black-oak table, at which so many generations of Treveans had sat, and were ensconced before a great log fire in the library, did the undercurrent in the minds of all three men rise to the surface.

"The Ides of March are come!" quoted Carne, with a smile, as he carefully selected a cigar from the box held out to him by the servant.

"Ay, but not gone!" Humphrey capped the quotation, and a shiver ran through him. "I wish to heaven this day *was* over!" he exclaimed in sudden desperate impatience. "These hours of waiting—waiting—waiting! It's driving me mad!"

"Only three and a half hours more, my son!" said Fremling. "Fight, Humphrey, fight! This invasion of fear and apprehension is a sort of smoke-screen your enemy is using to bewilder and unnerve you before the battle. No Trevean has ever shirked a fight."

"Nor will I, sir!" responded the boy, the color rising in his face. "But what am I to fight? What—where is my enemy?"

The manservant, who had withdrawn after placing decanters and glasses in readiness, returned at this moment.

"There is a stranger," he announced portentously. "A fiddler chap he is, asking food and shelter, Master Humphrey! He bade me say he'll play for you, if you're so minded, in payment for his victuals!"

The glass in Humphrey's hand fell from his suddenly relaxed fingers, and his eyes, dark with fear and doubt, turned toward Fremling.

There was a tense silence in the beautiful old room, as both men watched the boy—Carne with a certain anxiety in his pale eyes, and Fremling with profound compassion.

"What—what kind of a man is he?" Humphrey's voice was low and hoarse.

"Tall, queer-looking fellow, sir! A furriner, if I'm not mistaken. Looks like one o' they gipsies, with his great eyes and the gold rings in his ears. Appears middling bad to me, sir, on account of his having had no food for a couple of days, which I believe is true!"

Carne's pale eyes twinkled with a mocking gleam of laughter.

"Don't forget the curse is to take human form this time, according to Sir Donald!" he said.

The boy's eyes darkened under his frowning brows.

"I—perhaps it would be better——" He hesitated, then, meeting Fremling's grave glance, he flushed deeply and rose to his feet.

"Bring the man in, Jacob!" he commanded in a firm, ringing voice, his splendid young head thrown back defiantly. "Give him a good meal and tell him he can come in here to play for us, as soon as he is ready."

Carne fell back in his chair, a flicker of annoyance in his eyes.

"These strolling players are the lowest of the low," he remarked. "He's probably in league with a band of thieves after your valuables, and just wants a look around."

When, an hour later, the door opened to admit the stranger, the effect was almost that of a great lamp being lit in the big shadowy room; so vivid, so arresting, so compelling was the figure which stood on the threshold.

Dark, graceful, tall, and lithe as a young sapling, he stood smiling there, his fiddle under his arm, his great eyes roving from one face to another. Strange, changeful, stormy eyes they were, and they dwelt long on Trevean's handsome, boyish face, and as they gazed the fiddler's eyes grew wild and haunted.

"Clouds and darkness—the darkness of hell!" he cried, his voice vibrant and low as the notes his fingers struck from the violin he held. "The darkness of hell!"

Abruptly he strode into the room, crossed the worn and priceless rugs, and stood opposite the three men who were his audience. Jacob withdrew, but only to wait by the open door in the shadow of the portière—he and the other servants who had gathered to watch and listen on this privileged evening.

The first notes trembled out like the call of a wounded bird—low, desperate, appealing! The player's head drooped, his dark cheek nuzzled the old violin, his face dreaming and absorbed.

Humphrey shivered as the wild melody gathered up all the brooding fear which had pressed so close and heavy upon him all that day. Wilder and wilder the lament rose and swelled, until the room echoed with the terror that beat and surged within its walls.

All the evil that had pursued him since childhood seemed to be clamoring and shrieking, set free by the long fingers of the dark fiddler, who swayed in such passionate abandon before him. Humphrey's face grew white as chalk as he sat chained to his seat, while the music dropped to slow sobbing notes—the anguished voice of one at the last extremity of torment. His heart grew cold in his breast as the slow, fateful rhythm beat—beat—beat through his brain!

He could endure no more; darkness closed in on him; the throbbing music itself grew muffled and faint in his ears; there was a weight on his eyelids, a merciful numbness of every tortured nerve—when, suddenly, as if he had been dragged up

from a pit by his hair, a sharp chord stabbed him into life again.

The music swung into a tremendous lilting march, as the deep note of a clock in a shadowy corner of the room rang out.

At the eleventh and last chime, Carne sprang to his feet, his face transformed, his pale eyes gleaming with a savage triumphant fury.

Humphrey stared in astonishment, and Fremling's face set in its sternest lines, as Carne flung back his head and burst out into a wild barbaric chant, stamping his feet and tossing his arms like a creature possessed.

The dark fiddler's face was wet with effort, his strange eyes fixed on the man who stamped and chanted in time to his own savage music; his bow swept the strings remorselessly, and louder and deeper grew Carne's voice as the mad lilting melody wrought him to frenzy.

"He's drunk!" Humphrey's low, shocked voice reached Fremling.

"Drunk! Yes, drunk with the sense of his own power! Do you know what he sings?"

"Can't understand a word of it."

"Yet it is the language of your own ancient race. That was the war-song of his tribe centuries ago! Many a Penhale swung over the Cornish moors to that same chant you hear now, with his spear or ax on his shoulder. Many a Trevean heard that song as his life-blood stained the purple heather."

Humphrey's eyes turned back to Carne.

"Who—who is that man?"

"It is your enemy," answered Fremling, his low clear voice distinct even in the tumult of sound which echoed and re-echoed about them. "That is your ancient enemy—*Jabez Penhale!*"

At the word, the fiddler dropped his bow and staggered back against the wall, while Carne crouched like an animal about to spring, then burst into a yelling laugh:

"At last my hour is come! The hour for which I have striven through the centuries. I am your enemy! I am the curse of your house, Humphrey Trevean!"

Under the cold, malevolent stare of those pale eyes, the latter was held like a bird before a python's deadly regard. Hypnotized, spellbound by the inhuman devilish hate which confronted him, Humphrey stiffened helplessly and watched his enemy with wide, unblinking eyes.

Moans and gasps came from the huddle of servants at the open door; then a shot rang out, and the faithful Jacob stumbled into the room with his weapon still pointing toward the man known as Carne. Again and again he shot, but the bullets glanced harmlessly from their target, provoking another mirthless shout of laughter.

"No weapon can injure me—this is my hour! Fire will not burn me, nor water drown me; no element can do me harm in this hour of mine! Humphrey Trevean, your time is come!"

"No!" Fremling's clear voice fell like cold water on a raging fire. "No, Jabez Penhale! It is true no mortal weapon can defeat you, no human power snatch your triumph from you. Yet, there is a weapon I hold across your path!"

"There is no weapon! I am like Baldur of old . . . I am as one of the gods for this brief hour!"

"My weapon is my *will!* Not human, but superhuman! Not mortal, but immortal!" And Fremling looked steadily into the pale, vengeful eyes which confronted him. "Your hate is human, Jabez Penhale; therefore the superhuman in me shall conquer it."

The dark fiddler still leant gasping against the wall; Jacob, his revolver smoking in his hand, stood gaping and foolish in the center of the room;

while the heir sat like a frozen statue in his chair, his eyes fixed and vacant.

The clock ticked away the fateful minutes; the logs broke and fell apart on the hearth, turning cold and gray as the heat went out of them. The windows shook and rattled as if palsied with fear, and the old timbers of floors and walls creaked uneasily as if under pressure of unseen things which crept forward to watch the silent, terrific duel being fought in their midst.

Sir Donald Fremling's face was gray with effort, his eyes, sunk deep in his head, were the eyes of one who sees the very gates of hell flung back, but they were resolute and unafraid.

Slowly, heavily, dreadfully, the awful minutes passed. And slowly did Carne's face and figure shrink and wither under the steady will which confronted him.

His hair whitened and grew sparse; his skin wrinkled into a thousand lines, and his pale eyes blinked from sunken sockets; his shoulders stooped and sagged beneath a weight of years; his knees bent and shook in the extremity of old age. It was an old, old man who stood there at last, trembling with a passion too strong for his worn-out body. It was Jabez Penhale himself, carrying the dreadful burden of the centuries on his stooping shoulders.

The hands of the clock crept on and on, crawling toward the midnight hour! The little old figure became convulsed with frenzy; froth gathered on the withered lips; the shaking hands clawed the air as he made a tottering step toward Humphrey.

The first chime of midnight struck!

Fremling put out his hand and held the wizened, apelike creature back:

"To your own place, Jabez Penhale! Your hour is past!"

Twelve strokes rang out, and that which Fremling held shrank and dwindled, until it was merely a shadow . . . frail as a withered leaf . . . insubstantial as foam on the waters!

The last chime echoed in the silence, and the shadow melted to a mere handful of dust, which a sudden draft of air caught up and swirled madly, in a spiral of gray ash, on the hearth, to mingle there with the powdered wood-ash of the logs.

5

Fremling turned to the dark fiddler and clasped him by the hand.

"Humphrey," he said, "you owe everything to this man! It was his inspired music which made Carne reveal himself before his time. Had he waited another hour he might have won!"

But the fiddler stood humbly before Fremling, a child's expression of trust and reverence on his beautiful face.

"Never in any land have I met a man such as you," he said in a wondering voice. Then, turning to Trevean, he tucked his violin under his chin, and drew out a soft low strain —a tender, gay little air which brought tears to the eyes of his listeners.

"Harken, young master! So shall the voice of your first-born sing to your heart!"

And with a last flashing smile the dark fiddler disappeared, and presently his music came drifting back on the wind . . . the voice of love . . . of youth . . . of happiness!

THROUGH the VEIL

by ANNE M. BILBRO

"He half dragged his prisoner to headquarters."

OLA MADIN was not a detective. She was not even educated, but she possessed that indefinable, intangible thing, a sixth sense. A sense of knowing things. No one knew how or why she knew; Ola herself did not know how she knew. She only knew that she knew.

It had always been so, since she was a child. Ola looked straight beyond the surface of visible things, sometimes through the invisible veil, and saw the truth.

So it was that when old Mr. Lenn came to her humble cottage by the sea looking for room and board, Ola took him in promptly, where many another would have wanted to think twice about it. For Mr. Lenn was worn, and shabby, and silent, and he had no baggage except one battered and almost dilapidated old traveling-bag.

Mrs. Agger was frankly doubtful. She was Ola's only other lodger, and she worked in the laundry of one of the fashionable hotels in the near-by beach resort. Manda Agger was glad to rest her tired body at night in Ola's poor but homelike little house in the fishing village which lay on the fringe of the sea-coast town. They were women of fifty.

"You don't know a thing about that old man, Ola," cautioned Mrs. Agger, after Mr. Lenn had been with them a short time.

"They ain't no harm in him," Ola had answered.

"But he's mighty silent," persisted Manda. "Never has nothin' to say. And he's got a kind of *listenin'* look that seems queer to me. Carries a mighty fat pocketbook, too, for such a pore-lookin' man."

Ola waved the subject aside with a brief gesture. "That ain't nothin'. Don't worry about him," she replied.

Ola understood. He was just a tired, lonely old man; his silence merely a relaxation, a settling down into long-wished-for quiet and peace. No. He was not rich. The fat pocketbook probably contained all he had in the world, and he was doling it out weekly to cover his small needs during his remaining years. Not many years; somehow Ola knew that, too. And as to the listening look, she had also seen that look in the tired old eyes, and she knew for what he was listening: a voice, but no one besides the old man would hear that voice.

There was only one room upstairs, with steps leading up from the small front room, which was kept for general use. Ola and Manda shared a room at one side, and the kitchen was at the back. This upper room Ola prepared for Mr. Lenn. From her own bed she took a comforter to soften the hardness of his mattress. She installed a small wood-stove. The old man might like to smoke his pipe by his own fire sometimes on cold winter days, or nights, and driftwood on that stormy coast was plentiful. One need never want for a cheery blaze.

When Mr. Lenn ventured timidly to ask if he might wash his shirts and underwear in her laundry tub, Ola promptly took the matter in her own hands.

"Lor', Mr. Lenn, men don't know nothin' about them things. You just get up your clothes every Monday mornin', and I'll do 'em for you."

Hesitatingly then, he asked the price. But Ola's clear eyes saw it all. Money for laundry hadn't been figured on in the little weekly stipend which came from that worn and bulging old pocketbook.

"Price?" said Ola, surprizedly. "Why, it won't be enough to amount to nothin'. 'Tain't a bit of trouble. I have to wash my own things, and there's the water and suds all ready. Tell you what, Mr. Lenn; if you wanter do it, you can pay me by—er—I wonder if you know anything about dressin' fish?"

Mr. Lenn brightened. Why, yes, he used to be quite a fisherman, and sailor. He knew all about dressing fish. He had already watched Ola coming in from sea in her little fishing-boat, bringing with her a mess of fish for supper. Ola had not asked him to go out for a trip. At a glance it could be seen he was too frail, and the sea was sometimes rough. But he liked to sit on the rocks and watch the fishers going and coming.

"Well now," said Ola, "I'll tell you what. I'll keep your clothes washed and mended, and you can help about the fish on the nights I have 'em for supper, if you feel like it. And sometimes when you are goin' for a walk over the town, you might do some little erran' for me, and save me the trip. So you see, me doin' the washin' ain't nothin' a-tall." Ola looked away, for she had seen a sudden mist in his eyes.

She needed no help about the fish, or the errands—sturdy Ola, with her strong back and limbs; but Mr. Lenn didn't know that, and eagerly he agreed to the exchange of service.

Ola's words were few and awkward, but he felt the underlying kindness; for a long time kindness had been a rare thing in his life. It was more than comforting—it was exhilarating—to feel that there was a place where he might still be of use. Mr. Lenn grew brisk and cheerful, though never talkative. A great contentment had come to the old man. Ola's shabby house was a blessed haven of rest. When he wakened in the morning there was no more of the old apathy of lying an hour longer in bed—just to shorten the day. Days are long when one has nothing to do. Now it was quite different. There were definite and interesting things to do. First the early breakfast in Ola's

homely little kitchen. Fresh, strong coffee. Substantial wheat-cakes. Always an egg for the old man. But more than all, the air of home. The clean, bare floor; the cheap blue china; the glow from the wood-stove; the fresh, salt tang of the sea. Far, far back into the years it carried Mr. Lenn, to the time when he was a boy. He liked sitting with Ola and Mrs. Agger at the little round kitchen table. He liked listening to the quiet chatter of the women.

After breakfast there were odd jobs which one might find for the looking. Driftwood to be gathered. A loose plank to be nailed tight. A fence-rail to mend. Mr. Lenn was orderly and tidy; he liked to make things shipshape. Then there would be his quiet hour on the rocks. Watching the sea; smoking his pipe. Then lunch. Rye-bread and cheese, and a cup of hot tea. Plenty; quite plenty. Wouldn't there be supper later on when Mrs. Agger came from her work, and Ola had fried the day's catch of fish, and the three of them again sat in the friendly, cheery little kitchen?

About three times a week in the middle of the afternoon Ola would push out in her small boat; out just a bit beyond the shallows; not too far; and when the sun began to slant low Mr. Lenn would be waiting at the beach with his knife and pail of fresh water. As Ola eased her boat in and made the line fast, he would ask, with interest, "How many?"

"Plenty for supper," Ola would answer; sometimes, "Plenty for supper and breakfast." Then she would pass up the path to the kitchen, while Mr. Lenn, by the water's edge, skilfully dressed the fish. Oh, there was plenty to do now! No more lonely, empty days. No more feeling of being cut off from the world, of having outlived his time and usefulness.

Of his past life he had spoken only once. His family had always been small, and he had outlived them all. His more distant relatives had thought he ought to enter a home for old men, and he hadn't wanted to do so.

"Why, the idea! Anybody as useful as you! Course you didn't want to, Mr. Lenn," Ola had said.

That was all. But Ola was constantly finding little things that Mr. Lenn might do, and the old man had not in a long time been so happy as he was in this humble little home.

Sometimes a rainy day would come when there could be no working at jobs out of doors, or walks by the sea, and Mr. Lenn could only sit quietly by the window, with his pipe. But if the distant, listening look came into his eyes, Ola was always ready to meet it. "Well, I do declare, if time ain't slipped up on me!—Mr. Lenn, *would* you mind startin' up the fire in the stove while I get my potatoes peeled?"—or something of the kind.

Quickly the shadow would vanish from the old man's face. It was good to be needed.

Gradually his seventy-six years weighed less heavily upon him. His step grew more elastic. He began to take daily walks into town. But he was never late for his lunch; never out long; always back before sunset.

Manda had quickly lost all her suspicions, and was frankly glad of Mr. Lenn's presence. "It's real nice to have him, Ola," she would say. "So quiet and willin' to help, and not a bit of trouble. I always did think it gave a place a more homelike look to have a man around—I mean the right kind of man—doin' little things, or settin' around smokin' his pipe, even if it is a old man. Makes me think of when I was a child and my gran'father useter'——"

Manda would chatter on, and Ola, saying nothing, would feel a deep satisfaction as she glanced out of the window and saw Mr. Lenn raking the little yard in the early morning sunlight, while she and Manda prepared breakfast.

He had now been living at Ola's house for many months—nearly a year—and yet the shabby leather purse still bulged. The thing was simple. When a large bill was changed, a number of smaller bills were stowed away, and this kept Mr. Lenn's pocketbook quite prosperous-looking. Ola had often thought it unwise for the old man to carry his purse constantly with him on his walks and rambles. But Mr. Lenn always returned safe from his short excursions, and Ola had ceased to worry.

However, a day came at last when Mr. Lenn went out and did not return. He was not waiting at the rocks when Ola came in from sea with her supper fish. He had not come when supper was ready. There was a deep crease in Ola's brow. She moved silently about her duties, but her hands were unsteady, her gaze vacant.

"Might be he had supper with somebody in town—that friend of his, maybe.—What's his name?" vaguely suggested Manda.

"Calls himself Jodson. 'Taint his name," said Ola.

"Lor' now, Ola, you don't know that—I thought Mr. Jodson seemed like a real clever kind of person. Got a honest face, and looks you straight in the eye," from Manda.

"*Too* straight," replied Ola.

The evening wore on, the red glow in the west giving way to purple; then violet-gray; then the velvet black of night, starlit. Still Mr. Lenn had not come.

"Hours passed. "Better go to bed, Ola," said Mrs. Agger wearily. "You know Mr. Lenn come in sudden, without no word; and now, might be he's just left the same way. Might be he'll be back tomorrow, or soon, just the same way as he come."

There was a strange glow in Ola's eyes, as she answered in a dull, lifeless voice, "He ain't comin' back."

"Well, do tell! You think he's just left for good like that?—Now *I* believe we'll hear from him, Ola," remonstrated Mrs. Agger.

"We'll hear. But he ain't comin' back," Ola replied. There was dreary finality in her voice.

The next day was Saturday. There was no news of Mr. Lenn. With a set look in her eyes, Ola went mechanically about her usual duties. She was waiting; waiting—for what? She did not know, but she was waiting. One thing she knew—there would never be that listening look in Mr. Lenn's eyes again. He had heard and answered the voice. And she knew, too, that he was lying somewhere—very still—there were rocks all about. But where? She did not know.

She recalled Jodson's visits to the house. Mr. Lenn had met him in town; he had told Ola about it—how Jodson had seemed a worthy fellow, in trouble, all his bit of money tied up in a bank which had closed its doors, and Mr. Lenn had lent him ten dollars. Ola had not liked the matter.

"Look here, Mr. Lenn," she had said, "bring him out to supper sometime." She wanted to see for herself what manner of man Jodson was. Mr. Lenn had spoken of him as a "friendly, decent kind of lad."

Jodson was no lad. He was a man of forty; broad, husky, with a plausible tongue. But Ola did not like his eyes; he met one's gaze with aggressive frankness.

"Too frankly," said Ola to Mrs. Agger afterward. "Them eyes of Jodson's are just a-sayin' to the world, 'Look at me, how straight I look you in the eye, and see for yourself what a honest man I am.' "

Ola knew they were lying eyes.

Jodson came several times, then to Ola's relief his visits ceased.

"Gone away somewhere, I guess," said old Mr. Lenn, simply. "I haven't seen him lately."

Saturday dragged to a dreary close. In Ola's mind every incident

connected with Jodson passed, over and over, in ceaseless review. And at last she knew why she was waiting.

Though few people knew it, Ola had a nephew on the police force of the near-by town. She seldom saw Jamie Deigham, but between the two there existed a feeling of friendly kinship, and on rare occasions Jamie came out to his aunt's cottage for one of her excellent fish suppers.

Late in the day of that Saturday Ola went to police headquarters seeking Jamie. Deigham was out of town, they informed her; would not be back till late in the night. Then she left a note urging her nephew to come to her house the next morning, as early as he could. There were things she wanted to talk over with him.

That night Mrs. Agger came in late, very tired. Saturday was always a hard day at the hotel. Ola had retired, and an oil lamp burned low in the bedroom which the two women shared.

"Any news?" asked Manda, as she removed the worn shoes from her tired, burning feet.

"Nothin'," answered Ola.

Silently Manda disrobed, and donned her coarse cotton nightgown.

"What you gonter do about it, Ola? What you waitin' for?" she asked querulously.

A pause; then Ola answered in one word, "Jodson."

"*Jodson?* — Humph. — What you think Jodson could tell you?"

Mrs. Agger turned out the lamp, and slumped heavily into her own bed. Soon she slept, while in the other bed Ola lay, wakeful, grieved over what she knew.

The next morning Jamie was there, early, in time for a cup of his aunt's strong coffee. Over the kitchen table the three talked earnestly. Ola said some strange things.

"But Ola," said Mrs. Agger, aghast, "how *can* you know that? They ain't a thing to go on. The old man may not be——"

Jamie Deigham held up a restraining hand. All his life he had heard of Ola's uncanny intuitions. He was impressed, but troubled with doubt.

"You say, Aunt Ola, he is lying somewhere—covered with rocks. But *where?* We can't do anything unless his body is found. No one has even heard he is missing. And this fellow Jodson—you see we've got to have proof of some kind. We don't even know where Jodson is."

"The old man's lying there, under rocks," Ola doggedly insisted, "and *Jodson knows* where it is. You don't have to hunt for Jodson. *He's comin' right here.* I want that you stay here, Jamie, and wait. Jodson ain't far away. And he's comin' here."

Jamie Deigham was uneasy. "Just what is it you want me to do, Aunt Ola? You see I couldn't afford to make a false move. We've got to have——"

Passionately Ola interrupted. "If you make a false move I'll take all the blame. But, Jamie, they ain't gonter be any false move. Just wait. You'll see. Look!" Suddenly she went to the window. "Yonder, Jamie; just turnin' the brow of the hill. That's him!"

She trembled with excitement, and the others, scarcely less moved, hurried to the window. In the distance a man came striding with confident step down the narrow road which led to the beach.

Ola was white and tense. "All I want you to do, Jamie, is just to watch him. You and Manda stay here. Hide yourselves so he can't see you, but *watch* him. Keep your eyes on his face. You'll know whether I've made a mistake. He's a coward, for all his bluster. And if I haven't made a mistake you'll know what to do. Just keep out of sight—and *watch.* I'll set by the front door, as he comes in. You'll see, Jamie. You'll see."

Deigham and Mrs. Agger exchanged furtive glances. The man approaching might not be Jodson,

after all. Was it possible that Ola was just a little—touched?

Jodson swung down the hill with jaunty stride. Reliant. Cocksure. Entirely satisfied with himself.

He had made a neat job of it, thought Jodson. Bumped him off with one shot. A good gunman never wasted bullets. Thrown the gun into the sea. Thrown the body in, too, weighted down with rocks tied up in a gunny-sack. Wouldn't have croaked the old codger at all if he hadn't refused to lend him the two hundred dollars he wanted.

Well, the old guy ought to have known better. Jodson shrugged. Deceitful, too. Going about with a bulging purse that looked like a million dollars, when he had only three hundred.

Well, three hundred was three hundred, and he had it safely cached. Not about him. Oh no! A smart man like Jodson wouldn't make that kind of slip. Merely a bit of loose silver jingled in his pocket. He had managed it cleverly. Oh, he was a smart fellow! Brave as they make 'em, too! He'd take a chance any time.

Not a soul had seen them together. No one even knew the old man was missing—besides those two old fool women at the house, and neither of them had sense enough to be suspicious. They probably thought the old fellow had just gone on to some other place. Only a lodger, anyway. Lodgers come and go. And even if anyone started inquiries for the old man, or found anything, they couldn't connect *him* up with it. He had been out of town for weeks. He had witnesses for that. No one knew he had been back on Friday. Oh no! He had his alibi all ready. So far as anyone knew he had only returned that very morning, and, the day being Sunday, he was going out to pay a little visit to his friend Mr. Lenn.

He was going to be greatly surprized when he heard that Mr. Lenn had been away since Friday. Oh yes, he'd be quite surprized, and sorry to miss Mr. Lenn; then that old fool Mrs. Madin would invite him to dinner, and they'd have fish, and hot muffins, and coffee. Fine!

Jodson had carefully worked out his alibi to the smallest detail. Only one thing he had not taken into account—Ola Madin's sixth sense. He had never even heard of a sixth sense, and if he had heard he wouldn't have known what it meant.

How little we know, after all, of those intangible forces in the invisible world lying right around us! How little we know what lies just around the corner! How little Jodson knew—clever Jodson!—as he strode whistling blithely, straight to his doom!

Up to the doorstep. Off with his cap. The door was open, and Ola sat quietly reading in the front room.

"Good mornin', Mrs. Madin," Jodson cheerfully greeted her.

"Mornin', Mr. Jodson. Fine day, ain't it?" Ola was unusually affable. "Have a seat."

Jodson complied, drawing up a chair unconcernedly. "I been away quite a spell. . . . How's Mr. Lenn? Can I see him awhile?"

"Why, yes. Sure," returned Ola promptly. "Walk right upstairs. Mr. Lenn's just gone up to his room. He come in only a minute or two ahead of you."

Jodson's beaming face suddenly froze. He stared at Ola, stammering, "Er—what—what was it you said, Mrs. Madin?"

Ola pretended not to notice. "I said he was upstairs, Mr. Jodson. He went out somewhere Friday, and hadn't been back. So when he come in just now, I was real glad to see him back again. I called out to him, but he didn't stop to say nothin'; just hurried right on up to his room. Guess he wanted to wash up before dinner. Didn't you see him as you come down the path? He wasn't

more'n fifty feet ahead of you. He'll be real glad to see you, Mr. Jodson; just go right on up."

But Mr. Jodson didn't go upstairs. He sat as if rooted to his chair, staring at Ola, his face ghastly white.

"Lor', Mr. Jodson, you look real pale! Ain't sick, are you?" said Ola with sudden concern. "If you don't feel like goin' up, I'll call him. . . . But never mind. Here he comes now. Must of heard us talkin'."

With superb naturalness she arose and drew forward a third chair, her eyes, the while, traveling down the stairway as if following someone slowly advancing.

"Well! I'm glad you are back, Mr. Lenn. We was about to get uneasy. Here's Mr. Jodson to see you."

Like stone sat Jodson. Staring. From the first there had been on his face no trace of natural surprize or curiosity, but only intense horror. Fear—stark, unmitigated. He shook like a leaf, his great brutal hands knotted together, with the knuckles showing white through the coarse skin.

"Lor' me! I believe you *are* sick," said Ola, innocently.

Where was Jodson, the brave man? —the clever, jaunty man? Was this Jodson? — this shrinking, hulking, trembling creature with fear-dilated eyes, hanging jaw, ghastly face?

He rose with a strangled cry, and started for the door, but Deigham was ahead of him, clapping a heavy hand on his shoulder. Jamie had seen it all, and had sprung like a cat from the kitchen at Jodson's first move.

"Wait a minute," said Jamie with authority. "Let's hear what it's all about."

Jodson pulled away, yelling in panic, "You ain't got a thing on me! —I ain't seen that old man in weeks! —I can prove it."

Ola held his eyes with her burning gaze, pointing her finger at the shrinking wretch. "You see him now, Jodson—right by your side! Rocks can't hold him down. Right by you, Jodson."

Jodson collapsed, cringing toward Deigham; throwing out his arms as if warding off some unseen thing; screaming hoarsely, "Take him away! Take him away! Don't leave me! Oh, for God's sake, don't leave me!"

Nothing more was needed—no witnesses, no evidence. Jodson was his own accuser. Quietly Deigham snapped on the handcuffs, and half led, half dragged his prisoner to headquarters.

That day Jodson confessed everything—all the sickening details of how the unsuspecting old man had been lured to his death. The body was found in the shallow cove which he described, and afterward it was given decent burial.

Ola and Manda placed a wreath of flowers on the lonely grave in the little plot overlooking the sea. Ola had bought the plot with Mr. Lenn's recovered money. "He'd want to be by the sea," she said.

Some time afterward Jamie ventured to ask his aunt a long-deferred question.

"Aunt Ola, did you really *see* Mr. Lenn—that day—coming down the stairs?"

Ola looked at him strangely, as she replied after a pause, "No matter what I did see, or didn't see, Jamie. But you can lay to this: *Jodson saw him.*"

SONNETS of the MIDNIGHT-HOURS

BY DONALD WANDREI

1. *The Hungry Flowers*

The fleshly flowers whispered avidly:
  This being's face is soft, he shall not pass;
  And all the little jeweled blades of grass
Made mutterings that sounded like low glee.
I laughed, though wanly; for it seemed to me
  These glittering swords that shone like broken glass,
  Though singly impotent, might be, in mass,
A savage, indestructible enemy.

So, hesitantly, I put forth my foot
  To see if they would open up a path;
I found my leg become a hellish root,
  And thereupon, as if to vent their wrath,
I saw the hungry flowers toward me crawl,
And on my flesh, their mouths, devouring, fall!

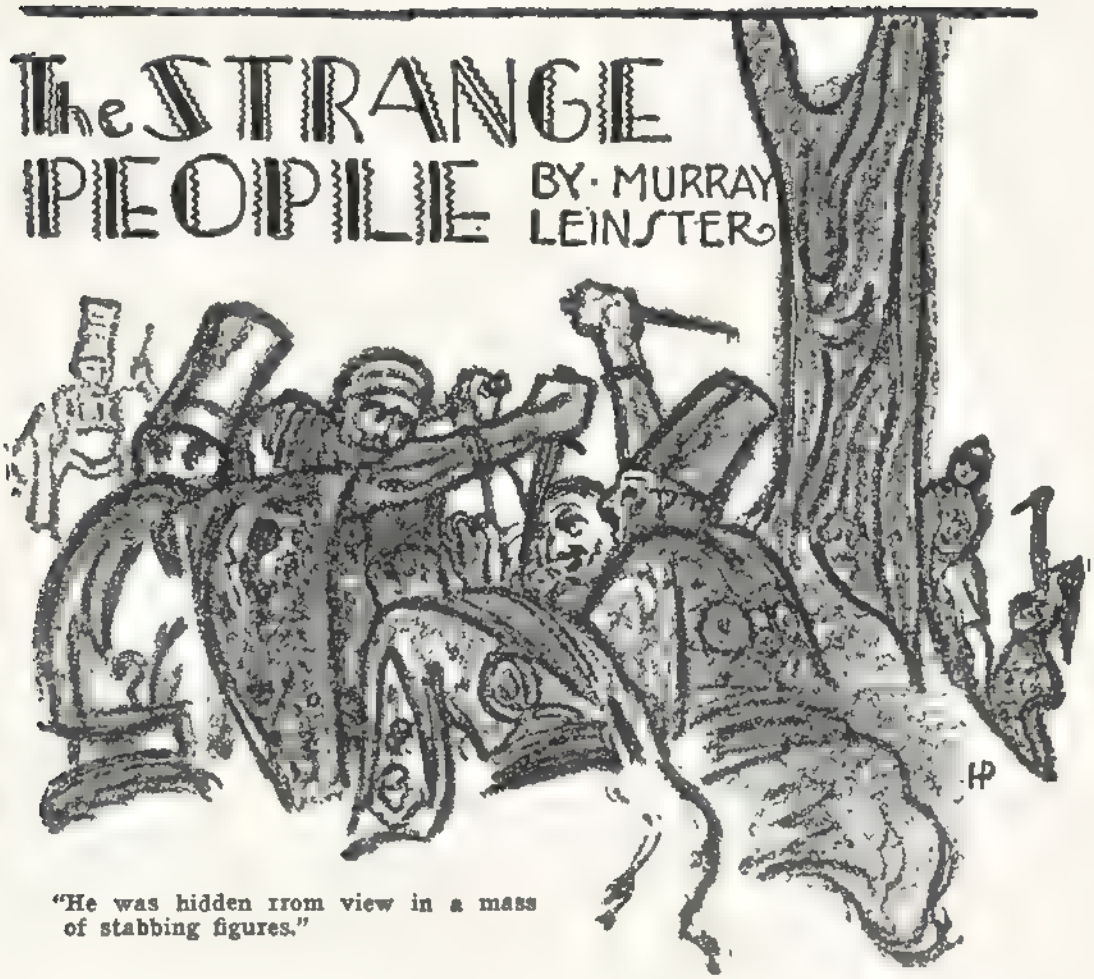
2. *Dream-Horror*

Now they have buried me in this dark pit,
  And all around, the weary corpses lie;
  They know that it will take me years to die,
Although my flesh with many knives is slit.
They would not burn me quickly on their spit;
  How much more exquisite to hear me cry
  With only rotten corpses lying by,
And bloated carrion rats that near me sit!

They left to me my eyes, so I could stare
  Around, and see the comrades that I had;
They left me also rotten corpses there
  To keep me company lest I go mad;
And then they left me, lonely, lying where
  The worms with endless, spoiling flesh are glad.

The STRANGE PEOPLE

BY · MURRAY LEINSTER



"He was hidden from view in a mass of stabbing figures."

The Story Thus Far

CUNNINGHAM and Gray go to the hills of New Hampshire to investigate a settlement of foreigners—a Strange People who have never seen a revolver, who strike from ambush by throwing sharp knives, who use strangely minted gold coins, and who keep aloof from everybody but themselves. Cunningham runs afoul of Vladimir, a sinister person whose brother has been killed by the Strange People because he knew the hideous secret that they have guarded with their lives. Vladimir bribes the sheriff to keep Cunningham and Gray away from the Strangers, and swears that by his knowledge of their terrible secret he will make them kiss the dust under his feet. One of the Strangers, captured by the sheriff's men, kills himself for fear that he may be forced to reveal the secret. Cunningham, falls in love with Maria, a girl of the Strange People, and rescues her from Vladimir. He has been warned that Maria can never marry him, lest she might reveal to him the awful secret of who the Strange People are and where they came from; and he is told that he will be put to death if he ever comes into the hills again. But the countryside is roused against the Strange People, and in order to get Maria back to her people and warn the Strangers to keep moving (for the excited farmers will shoot them down like dogs), he returns to them. Maria's father asks him, despairingly, "Why did you come back? You knew what we would have to do. Why did you come back?" In the meantime Gray has ordered help by airplane to stem the fanaticism of the farmers before the Strange People are massacred.

15

THE sun sank thunderously behind the mountain-range and tinted the tips of all the peaks with gold. Little fleecy clouds floated overhead in contented indolence. The wind of the heights was still. The pine-clad hills seemed very soft and restful as the shadows deepened on the eastern slopes, and contrasted strangely with the still-bright golden fields of the valleys yet unshadowed by the mountains.

Stephan held out a weary hand,

pointing. A sullen column of smoke rose from a point far distant. He pointed again, where a thin wisp of vapor grew steadily thicker and denser.

"Our houses," he said bitterly. "They are being burned. Vladimir has spoken, and we die."

Cunningham clenched his fists as the sullen gray clouds rose slowly upward in the still air. Once he saw figures moving about the base of the smoke. Once he thought he heard yelling.

"I don't think he's told your secret," he said after an instant. "That's the mob. Gray promised that help would come. He said it was coming by airplane. And Vladimir——"

He told Stephan swiftly what Vladimir had said to the sheriff: that the Strangers were to be surrounded by the mob, and that then he would speak to them; that they would submit, and that some would go away in chains to be hung for the murder of his brother, and that he would take the others away with him forever; that they would follow when he spoke to them and obey him in all things.

Stephan's eyes flashed fire for a second.

"'Is life so sweet or peace so dear,'" he quoted bitterly, "'as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery?'" He stopped short. "No," he said quietly. "We will not obey him. No!"

Cunningham felt again that curious impotent bafflement. Stephan had just quoted Patrick Henry's speech to the House of Burgesses, the famous "Give me liberty or give me death" speech. And Stephan had never seen a revolver until Cunningham showed him one, nor a shotgun save at a distance and in the hands of the farmers about him. None of the Strange People were better informed. Keeping passionately to themselves, it was possible that they would never have seen a pistol if they were ignorant of them before they came mysteriously to these hills. Revolvers are not common in country places, nor are those possessed displayed.

"You see," said Stephan with a faint smile, "how I was able to spare you for a time. It is likely that we will all soon be dead. And then it does not matter if you know our secret or not."

"Tell me now," begged Cunningham. "It will make no difference to you, and it may mean everything——"

Stephan smiled slowly at Maria, who was clinging to Cunningham's arm as if she feared that at any instant he might be torn away.

"You say you do not know," he said with a wretched attempt at lightness. "Maria loves you. You would despise her if you knew. Let her be happy as long as may be." He paused and surveyed the hillside with keen eyes, then added: "We trust you. We might have killed many of that mob already. They were careless. But we have fled before them. We will keep from killing them as long as we can, because you have asked it."

"Gray will be here!" said Cunningham passionately. "He has promised! Help will come!"

Stephan shrugged his shoulders and gave a low-voiced order in the unknown tongue which the Strangers spoke among themselves.

"Help," he said in a moment more, and smiled very wearily indeed. "The soldiers will come, no doubt. And then we die indeed. We move now, my son."

Half a dozen Strangers hovered near Cunningham. They were guards, to prevent his escape at any cost. That they would kill him to keep him from getting away there was no doubt. That they hated him was totally improbable. The faces of all the Strangers wore a settled,

fatalistic look. Every one was now clad in the barbaric costume they had worn about the fires the night before, as if they had abandoned all hope of pretending longer that they were of the same sort as the inhabitants of the valleys.

CUNNINGHAM followed as the Strangers moved on. Little bands of them were constantly appearing unexpectedly from the woods and joining the main body. There were quite two hundred in all when they passed over a hill-crest and settled themselves in the valley beyond.

The mob had appeared from Bendale. On horse-back, in motor-cars and in wagons drawn by teams, what seemed to be the whole population had come raging out to Coulters. The farmers of the valley had put their women-folk together and come armed with weapons, from shotguns to pitchforks. And they had surged into the hills in quest of the Strange People. All had forgotten that the only thing genuinely proved against the Strangers was the death of Valdimir's brother. All were hysterically convinced that the Strangers made a practise of kidnaping children and sacrificing adults in devilish orgies by their fires.

The belief was not unparalleled. To be peculiar is to invite suspicion. The Strangers were peculiar. Suspicion is always based on fear. What fear is more terrible than that of harm to one's children? Every unknown man or race of men has been accused of the one crime. Gipsies are not yet freed of the suspicion of kidnaping. A lurking tramp or wanderer is instantly and invariably suspected of intent to commit the same offense.

Was it odd, then, that the secretive folk of the hills had been classed as doubtful? The mysterious ceremony of the fires, as described by the ignorant and frightened constables, was capable of any interpretation. What had been doubts and vague surmises became certainties when coupled with the ceremony which was meaningless unless sinister.

Now the Strangers had withdrawn from the first of the mountain-slopes. They abandoned their homes to the mob without a struggle. The houses went up in flames. The Strangers had seen the columns of smoke rising to the sky.

Men and women wore a look of settled calm. A mob that vastly outnumbered them, and was vastly better armed, was seeking them in raging madness. They waited to die. Some of the younger men chafed at the delay in fighting. With their throwing-knives they might have picked off many of their persecutors, but Stephan had forbidden it.

They waited. Darkness fell. Through the stillness of early night came the sound of a shot, then another and another. Wild yells broke loose below.

After a long time a runner came panting to the bivouac. He had bound the embroidered sash that was part of his costume about his arm, but it was stained—a dark purple in the moonlight.

Stephan ordered another move. Uncomplainingly the Strangers rose and plodded farther into the hills. The children were weary. Fretful little cries rose from the long line. Women hushed them gently. There was little talk. Just a long line of barbarously clad people plodding with bowed heads onward, onward, onward, while a shouting, raving mob raged through the woods in quest of them.

Cunningham went with them. He had no choice, but it is doubtful if he would have done otherwise had he been able to.

Again the weary people settled for a little rest. Yells sounded faintly, far to the right. A red glow began

and grew larger and became a house burning with a crackling noise in the wilderness. Cunningham saw an old man rise on one elbow and peer at the flames. His face was apathetic. Then he lay down again.

"That was my house," he said quietly to the man nearest him, and was silent.

Again came runners, panting. One man was sobbing in rage and humiliation, begging leave to plunge into the mob and die fighting—alone, if need be.

Stephan refused him gently.

"I think we die," he said grimly, "but he"—Stephan pointed at Cunningham—"has promised that help will come. I do not believe it, but we can miss no chance. We have women with us, and children. We must hold ourselves for them. While the least chance remains, we must live."

Once more came the order to move. And once more the weary march began. It had no object and it had no hope. But beneath the full moon the Strangers plodded on and on, until the baying of dogs set up behind them.

"They've sent down in the valley and got dogs!" raged Cunningham in a blend of fury and sick horror.

Stephan stroked his chin and gazed at Cunningham.

"What now, my son?" he asked.

Cunningham shook his head in despair.

"This is the end," said Stephan quietly. "I think—I think we may let you go on alone, if you wish. You may escape."

"Maria?" demanded Cunningham, very white. He would feel like a coward and a scoundrel if he deserted these people, but if he could save Maria he would do it.

"No," said Stephan. "She is my daughter and I would save her life. But if our secret is known it is best that she die quickly with the rest."

Cunningham groaned and clenched his fists.

"I stay," he said harshly. "And —I fight with you!"

Sunrise broke upon the Strangers huddled high up on a bare and windswept peak. Its first cold rays aroused them. Gradually it warmed them. And it showed them clearly to a ring of still-raging men who were made savage by the ruin they had wrought during the night. From fifty places in the hills thin columns of smoke still rose wanly to the sky, from as many heaps of ashes that had been the Strangers' homes.

And shots began to be fired from the besiegers of the Strange People. Then Vladimir rode forward on a white horse and shouted to them in that unknown language.

16

Cunningham could not understand the speech of Vladimir, nor the replies that Stephan made. Only, once Maria clung to his arm in an access of hope.

"He has not spoken!" she whispered. "He is threatening now to tell them who we are——"

Then Vladimir was shouting promises, to judge by his tone. A moment later his voice was stern.

Maria sobbed suddenly. A growl went up from the Strangers, running all about among the huddled figures.

Far away over the hills a low-toned buzzing set up. It strengthened and grew louder. A black dot hung between earth and sky. It grew larger. A second black dot appeared; a third. Wings could be seen upon the first of the airplanes. More and more appeared until there were six in all, flying in formation and winging their way steadily toward the hills.

They darted back and forth, searching. Cunningham shouted joyously.

"There they are!" he yelled. "Tell Vladimir to go to hell, Stephan! We've got help with us now!"

Vladimir had heard the sound of the engines and stared upward. Then foam appeared upon his lips and he shrieked with rage.

"There will be soldiers upon those things?" asked Stephan quietly. The Strangers were gazing up at the swooping aircraft that quartered the hills like monster hawks, in quest of the Strangers and their enemies.

"Surely," Cunningham told him joyously. "They'll carry five men apiece, with the pilots."

Stephan rose and stepped forward, where he shouted in a stentorian voice to Vladimir. Maria gasped in terror and clung close to Cunningham.

"He is—he is going to do as Vladimir says!" she cried. "Do not let him do it! Oh, do not——"

Stephan turned and spoke in a low tone in the unknown tongue of the Strangers. And where there had been rebellion among the defiant folk on the peak before he spoke, afterward there were grim smiles. Men's hands loosened the knives in their belts.

Stephan shouted again in apparent panic, pointing up to the flying things that circled suddenly above them. And Vladimir's face contorted in a grin of direst cruelty. He called over his shoulder and rode forward until he was just out of throwing-knife range. Then he shouted once more.

At Stephan's low-toned order a cloud of knives went licking through the air and fell at his horse's feet. And Vladimir grinned savagely and rode up, quite up, among the Strange People.

They cowered as he drew close to them. They crawled upon the ground as he stared savagely about him. They shook in seeming terror as he snarled a phrase or two at them. Cunningham gripped his revolver, his eyes blazing amid all his bewilderment. He had never seen such beastly cruelty upon the face of any living man. Maria clung close to him, shaking in unearthly terror.

Vladimir rode his horse toward a cowering group. They rolled away, gasping in apparent horror, as the horse was upon them. Not one lifted a finger to defend himself. They seemed stricken with utter, craven terror. They crawled abjectly upon the ground before him.

Vladimir came upon the bullet-headed servant he had sent to kill Cunningham. The man fawned up at his master, bound hand and foot as he was. Vladimir gazed at him sardonically and spoke in a purring tone. Then he deliberately shot the man dead.

The Strange People cringed. Then Vladimir saw Cunningham. He rode over and stared down with cold, beastly eyes.

"Ah, my friend," he purred. "You know the secret of my folk, you say. Perhaps you lie, but it does not matter. You saw the end of my servant, did you not? That was for failing to kill you as I ordered. Do you remember that after that you struck me?"

Cunningham's fingers itched on trigger.

"I do," he said curtly. "You'd better run away, Vladimir. My friend Gray has some unbribed officers in those planes that are going to land in a minute or so."

Vladimir laughed.

"What difference?" he asked amusedly. "My people are cowed, now. They will swear to anything I choose to tell them. All that I need to do is hand over some of them to be hanged. One or two will go for killing my servant. They will confess to whatever I say. And I will take the others away with me."

"You're sure?" asked Cunningham grimly. "Quite sure?"

"But certainly," Vladimir laughed again. "They are afraid I will tell who they are. But you—— Time is short." He glanced at Stephan and his voice rasped. "Take away his weapons!"

Stephan approached Cunningham, cowering from the menace of Vladimir's eyes. He seemed to be in the ultimate of terror, but as he drew near to Cunningham, and Vladimir could not see his face, he smiled grimly. There was no terror on his face then. He made a reassuring gesture.

"Take it!" rasped Vladimir harshly. "Disarm him!"

Stephan's lips moved but Cunningham could not quite understand what he wished to convey. But he had two revolvers and he thrust one into Stephan's hand and drew and jerked the other behind him while Stephan's body covered the movement.

"Ah," purred Vladimir as Stephan drew back and handed over the weapon. "You see it is necessary to kill you, Cunningham. My folk will take the blame for it. I shall probably let Stephan hang for your murder. They need a lesson, you understand. But I will be merciful. A bullet through the heart——"

He raised Cunningham's own revolver, but he never fired it. As his arm lifted, Cunningham's own weapon came around. But Cunningham did not fire either. There was a panted ejaculation and a dozen Strangers seemed to spring from the earth. With the savagery and directness of so many panthers they leaped upon Vladimir. He was hidden from view in a mass of savagely stabbing figures who clung to him in a grim silence. Vladimir screamed just once, and his revolver went off with a deafening explosion. One of the Strangers rolled to the ground, coughing, while he grinned in spite of his agony.

And then Vladimir fell with a crash to the ground and lay still.

There was a shout from the Strangers. Men yelled and the younger ones darted out to where their knives had been tossed before Vladimir. They came racing back with armfuls of the shining blades. They distributed them swiftly, grinning as they did so.

And in less than two minutes from the time Vladimir had ridden up to the peak where the Strangers lay barricaded, he had died and the Strangers were again lying in wait for the attack that they were sure would result in their annihilation.

But the great airplanes came coasting down heavily. Their motors shut off one by one and they zoomed to lose speed and pancaked with sudden awkwardness to the earth. This was no ideal landing-place. Three of them alighted safely. One was tilted sidewise by a sudden gust of wing and crumpled up a wing against a tree. Two others crashed their landing-gear on boulders on the rocky hillside.

Then Gray leaped out of the first to land, shouting frantically to the besiegers to fire no more. Men jumped from the others and spread themselves about the peak. They were alert grim figures with rifles which they handled with familiar ease. And Gray came running up to the embattled Strangers, his hands high above his head, and shouting that he was a friend.

17

"PLANES had to land at the Junction last night," said Gray curtly to Cunningham. "Didn't get here until sunset and couldn't land in unfamiliar territory after dark, particularly this kind of territory. I went on and met them last night. We took off at sunrise. What happened? Any fighting?"

"Several of us shot," said Cunningham grimly. "Nobody killed that I know of. But every house in the hills has been looted and burnt."

"Fools!" snapped Gray. "But they'd do that.—What's that?"

He was staring at a sprawled heap on the ground.

"That was Vladimir," said Cunningham calmly. "He'd just shot his servant for failing to kill me, and was shooting me down in cold blood when the Strangers jumped him. You don't get a murder case out of this, Gray. They killed him to save my life."

"Glad of it," said Gray restlessly. "Now——"

"By the badge you've stuck on your coat," said Cunningham grimly, "you're a detective of some sort. And I suppose those chaps who came in the planes are Federal men. What do you want with the Strangers, Gray?"

Gray stirred uneasily. Then he faced Cunningham squarely.

"I'm in the immigration service," he said flatly. "These people are aliens, smuggled in. You can guess the rest of it yourself."

"I can't," said Cunningham savagely. "There's more to it than that, and they won't tell me; not even Maria."

Stephan spoke quietly. "Do you know who and what we are?"

"I do," said Gray curtly. "You're——"

Stephan stopped him with an upraised palm. His face was the color of ashes.

"Then you know," he said tonelessly, "why we prefer to die here. And since our young friend will not leave us of his own will, my young men will carry him, bound——"

"Try it," said Cunningham briefly. "If there's fighting, I fight. If Maria dies, I die. That's all."

He brought his remaining weapon into view and held it grimly.

Gray stared from one to the other. He shrugged his shoulders almost up to his ears and waved his hands helplessly. And then he said quickly, "Since I know, and the soldiers know, there's no harm in telling Cunningham."

Maria, her lips bloodless, whispered, "Tell him. It is best."

But it was to Gray that Stephan turned. His back was toward Cunningham as he made a gesture for Gray's benefit alone. Cunningham could not see, but it seemed as if Stephan had thrust up the wide sleeve of his embroidered jacket. And Gray licked his lips and said, "Oh, my God!"

"I tell you my own story," said Stephan quietly. "The others are much the same. Twenty years ago I was the son of a village headman in Daghestan, which is in southern Russia. And there came upon me suddenly this—this thing which has made me one of the Strangers."

Gray, shuddering, nodded. Cunningham raised his head.

"What thing?" he demanded.

"My own people would have stoned me when they knew," said Stephan grimly. "My own father would have killed me. And I was a fool then. I desired still to live. I had heard whispers of this America, in which the son of the Governor of Daghestan had found a mine of gold so rich that he must work it secretly. It lay in a hidden valley, unknown to other men, and it was worked by—Strangers, who were safe in that one small valley so long as they served the lord Vladimir, while anywhere else in the world all men would kill them."

"Why?" demanded Cunningham fiercely.

Stephan did not answer directly.

"I went down from the mountains that I loved, away from all my kin, and I went to the Governor of Daghestan and said that I wished to work in the mine of his son. And he sent me to a place, closely guard-

ed, where there were others who were—as I was. And a long time later a boat came, and it took us many days upon the sea, and landed us secretly by night, and we traveled secretly, hiding, for many more days. And we came to the hidden valley ruled by the lord Vladimir and found two hundred other Strangers turned to slaves and working in the gold-mine he had discovered. They told us we would have done better to be stoned in our own villages than to come. We were driven to work with whips. If we rebelled we were shot down by the guards, who carried guns."

Gray moved suddenly.

"This was twenty years ago?" he demanded. "And you were kept a prisoner in that valley all that time, by guards with guns?"

"All of us," said Stephan quietly. He thrust with his foot at the body of Vladimir, lying in the dust before him. "That was our master. He had us taught the English language so that if other people came upon the valley we would seem to be of this nation. Three times—no, four times—wandering men came into the valley. None of them ever left it. They were killed by the guards. . . ."

Gray stirred, his eyes moving fascinatedly from one to another of the Strange People.

"But we had been free men, once," said Stephan proudly. "We wept at first because we were—Strangers. Then we grew ready to fight because we were men. Many times, in those twenty years, we planned revolt. There were two or three Strangers among us who were from this nation. One of them became my wife and the mother of Maria. She had been a teacher in the schools, and she taught us much. But Vladimir seemed to hear our secret thoughts. Every time he forestalled our plans and punished us horribly for daring to think of revolt. Men said that he stretched threads of metal to our houses and that our words traveled to him along those threads, so that he knew always what we planned."

"Telephones," said Gray, fascinated, "but in the walls. Of course he could listen in."

"So at last we made our plans in the woods of the valley." Stephan spread out his hands. "We stole of the gold we dug. We gave it to five of our number, and they fled away. They bought horses and food—many horses and much food. They found a hiding-place for us. And while they were doing that, Vladimir was torturing us to learn where they had gone and why. But though four men and a woman died, they did not tell. And suddenly, in a night, we Strangers who were slaves of Vladimir, we fled from the valley. We killed the guards with our knives and vanished, hiding in the secret place the first five men had found. It was secret and secure. And then——"

Stephan hesitated.

"My wife, who was of this nation, had been born in these hills here. She told us of these hills as of Paradise. So we sent again a few of our number here. With the gold we had brought away, we bought ground. Then, a little by a little, all of us came. We kept far from other people. We did them no harm. Now they want to kill us, because Vladimir doubtless told them before he died that we were lepers, and because we are lepers, we must die."

He turned grimly to Cunningham and bared his forearm. And the skin of that forearm was silvery.

Cunningham's tongue would not move. Gray shivered.

"I'll—I'll admit," he said shakenly, "I didn't bargain for this. Good God!" He stared at the somber-faced Strangers with a queer terror. Then he shook himself suddenly. "But look here——!"

Cunningham found himself speaking hoarsely. "Not Maria!" he gasped. "Not Maria!"

Stephan's face, the color of ashes, had only compassion upon it as he watched Cunningham.

"Wait a bit," cried Gray. "Wait a bit! Stephan! That—that thing on your arm. It comes first on the elbows and knees, where the clothing rubs! Redness first, then this?"

"That is it," said Stephan quietly. "We have seen our children appear so. We have tried—ah, how we have tried!—to keep them from being Strangers too. But it is in the blood. Maria has showed it not even yet. But in time to come——"

"Nobody," panted Gray excitedly, "ever got it over fifty years of age!"

"Those who have come to us," said Stephan, "have always been young."

Gray struck his hands together.

"But it shouldn't be that way!" he cried. "It should take all ages. It should show on the face and hands! Not one of you shows it on the face or hands. There should be a dark band across the forehead. The fingertips should be silver, and the fingers should be twisted and bent. . . . Have you ever seen a doctor?"

Stephan smiled grimly. "That"—he pointed again to Vladimir's body—"when that was our master, he had a doctor to keep us alive. And there was never any doubt."

"I was at Ellis Island," said Gray excitedly. "I know what I'm talking——"

"It is finished," said Stephan grimly. "We die. Go and send your soldiers or your people to kill us."

"Cunningham, make him listen——"

"Go on, Gray," said Cunningham hoarsely. His face was ashen. "They'd only put us in some—some horrible colony somewhere. I—I don't want to live after this. If they want to die, let them. I'm going to stay and—and get killed with them, if I can."

"Idiot!" snapped Gray. "I've been telling you for half an hour that the symptoms are all wrong. And I was on Ellis Island and I know what they have got! And I know how they got it. Why, you idiot, don't you see that Vladimir was getting his father to send him slaves to work that damned mine? That the only way they could be kept as slaves would be to make them think they'd be killed if anybody else knew what he knew about them? They didn't get that thing naturally. They were deliberately inoculated with *psoriasis,* a sub-tropical skin affection that looks enough like leprosy to give anybody a start, but doesn't make a person unfit to work! These poor devils thought they were lepers, and they had a skin affection that is about as serious as dandruff! Creosote ointment or arsenic taken internally will cure it in ten days, and without one of those two things it lasts for years. Cooped up as they were, they reinfected each other. Believing themselves pariahs, they were afraid to run away from Vladimir until they had to. And he was trying to bluff them back to work in his mine. Don't you see, you idiot? Don't you see? It was a trick to get workers for his mine, workers who wouldn't dare be disloyal to him. And when they had run away, why, he had to get them back or they might find out themselves what he'd done and tell where his mine was and about all the crimes he's committed these twenty years back. Don't you see, Cunningham, don't you see?"

He turned to Stephan, who was staring at him incredulously.

"If you don't think I'm telling the truth," he snapped, "I'll go and kiss every pretty girl in camp to prove it! You've been here twenty years. I can't touch you. I can't deport

you. And I'm mighty glad of it! As for killing Vladimir and his brother, I'm going to do my best to get you medals for the performance. I'm going to set my men on these fool farmers and chase 'em home. We'll sue them for the houses they've burnt. We'll put that sheriff in jail. We'll—we'll—— Cunningham, you lucky son-of-a-gun, I'm going to be best man and kiss the bride!"

But Cunningham was already precedirg him in that occupation.

19

It was a very, very long time later. Cunningham was sitting peacefully upon the veranda of a house among tall mountains. His eyes roved the length of a valley that was closed in at the farther end by precipitous cliffs. There were small, contented sounds from the house behind him.

A motor-car rolled up a smooth, graded roadway. A man by the road saw the occupant of the car and shouted a greeting. Cunningham sprang to his feet and ran down to meet it.

Gray tumbled out of the car and gripped Cunningham's hand.

"I brought my fishing-rods," he announced exuberantly. "Where's that stream you were writing about?"

"Find it in the morning," said Cunningham happily. "How d'you like our valley?"

Gray came up the steps and stared out at the empty space below him. There were tall buildings down in the valley floor—great concrete buildings, with a tall shaft-house where motors whirred and an engine puffed.

"There ain't any such place!" announced Gray firmly. "I'm dreaming it! I found a concrete road leading here. I passed half a dozen motor-trucks on the way. And one scoundrel waved at me from a steering-wheel and I'll swear he's the chap that had a knife in the small of my back once, ready to stick it in."

"Quite likely," admitted Cunningham, grinning. "He is quite glad, now, that he did not stick it in. I've spread the news that you were the one who proved their title to the valley, through twenty years' occupation."

Gray squirmed, then grinned.

"Might be useful," he admitted, "to be popular here, in case there are any more fire-ceremonies going on."

Cunningham's face was serious for a moment.

"They were desperate, then," he said. "They'd tried the Christian God and things still looked black. So they called upon some ancient deities that their forefathers had worshiped. . . . You mustn't blame them, Gray."

"I don't." Gray grinned. "But I do want to study their dialect, Cunningham."

"Go ahead. It's disappearing. We're going in for politics, and boy scouts, and radios. We are a long way from a railroad, but our mine has built a road to it, and we have a motor-truck line that's as good as a trolley any day. We're highly civilized now, Gray."

He opened the door into the house. And there was Maria to smile and give Gray her hand.

"Your husband," said Gray, "has been boasting outrageously about what's happened in the valley since you people came back."

"He did it all," said Maria proudly. "Nobody does anything, ever, without asking him."

Gray chuckled and lifted an eyebrow at Cunningham.

"You haven't seen the prize exhibit yet," said Cunningham hastily. "Chief!"

There was a movement and Stephan came up a flight of steps that led outside. There was a tiny figure balanced on his shoulders. Stephan twinkled as he saw Gray, and he set his burden on the ground.

"I found him," he announced proudly, "going down the hillside with his air-rifle. He was going to hunt bears. That is a grandson!"

Gray stooped and beckoned. The small figure came shyly forward.

"Son," said Gray gravely, "don't you waste your time on small game like bears. Wait until you grow up a bit, and see a picture of a pretty girl in a magazine, and you find out where she is. And then—why, then you can start out on the route to romance and adventure."

[THE END]

A Short Spider-Story

The Black Madonna

By A. W. WYVILLE

HOUSES with shuttered windows, houses with a hangdog air, going to ruin. Houses about which strange tales are told. Tales of strange happenings. Such will always fire the imaginative. Of such a house I tell.

It was situated on the outskirts of a small village, a village famed in the Revolutionary War. I lingered and gathered its history, bit by bit. A story that will draw smiles from the unbelieving, yet cause thoughtful men to pause, as I paused, pondering over the strange ways in which fate sometimes evens scores.

The house had been vacant several years. Shunned by the villagers. They did not claim that it was haunted. Its gruesome story forbade tenants.

The last occupants had been two brothers. One a tall, hawk-nosed, surly character, the younger a pleasant chap with dark brown eyes and a small mustache. Slight of build. Chemists they were; brilliant chemists, we heard. They hired no one, doing their own cooking and general work. Partitions had been torn out and an expensive laboratory installed. Bottles upon bottles. Retorts and electric furnaces of the most elaborate description. Word went around that they were working on a great chemical problem, the solution of which would revolutionize a major industry.

Although the elder brother was seldom seen on the village streets, the younger would often pass through on his way to the city, driving an expensive car. Sometimes he would stop and talk. He talked on many subjects but never of his work. All such questions he skilfully parried. While his main interests were centered on his work, he also spent some time on a hobby, zoology. He would often be seen in the fields on

a summer day, equipped with a long-handled net. A strange combination of interests.

Lights glowed in their house until far into the night. A tall figure could be seen moving behind the shades. Not long after the brothers had moved in, there came to the village one night the sound of a muffled explosion. Lurid flames shot from the house of mystery. The village fire department soon had the flames under control, however. To do so they had been obliged to enter the laboratory, from whence the explosion took place. What they saw was the talk of the town, although the occupants had got them out as soon as they could, seeming to fear that they would see too much. Some people wondered if perhaps they were not counterfeiters.

THE brothers repaired the damage and the talk died down. The next happening of interest came from a different quarter.

It came in a bunch of bananas. The local grocer found it. A hairy spider, with a bright red spot on its back. It was then the middle of winter and the repulsive thing was in a torpid state from the cold. Instead of killing it, the grocer, perhaps with an eye for advertising, placed it in a small wire cage with a lighted electric lamp for warmth.

He had not misjudged its potential attraction qualities. Revived by the warmth, it was soon crawling around its cage seeking an opening. The whole town had seen it and speculated about it, when it was drawn to the attention of the young chemist, he being "interested in bugs and sich," as they put it.

One look at the spider, and the young man drew in his breath sharply.

"A Black Madonna," he whispered.

Of course that meant nothing to the villagers. He explained. It seems that the Black Madonna is the most poisonous spider known to science. Death almost invariably follows its bite.

This information put the grocer into a cold sweat, for he remembered how free he had been in handling it. He was for immediately destroying it. The young chemist offered to buy it, alive. The grocer dubiously assented. After all, it was clear profit. We never saw it again.

Spring came in cold, severe snowstorms following on one another's heels. The two brothers were more or less isolated. Late wayfarers reported that the lights burned as brightly as ever in the house.

From this point my story will have to be partly guesswork and deductions from what came to light later.

UPON arriving at the house with his prisoner, the young man took it to his room to examine at his leisure. Kept it warm and fed it gnats. It seemed to thrive. However, he did not let it interfere with his research work.

The two brothers were working independently toward the same goal. The elder worked at night, while his brother utilized the daylight hours. Each kept his progress to himself. An odd arrangement.

The younger man won. When his brother rose from his bed one afternoon, having worked through the night, he found the other with shining eyes. Yes, it had been by accident. Just stumbled on it. Meant international fame!

Just stumbled on it! Just by accident! The words repeated themselves in the elder brother's brain. He almost hated his kinsman. All his work for nothing. More than life itself he craved the fame that would come with success.

His brother heeded it not. Honor was reaching for him, and he was blind to the other's expression. An expression not good to look upon. He locked his notes in the cabinet and went to his room. Here he made a discovery that sobered him for a minute. The Black Madonna had escaped!

Carefully and thoroughly he searched the room. The spider was nowhere to be found. The window was partly open, and he finally decided that it must have departed through this opening. Well, it would soon perish in the cold.

Long into the evening his brother stayed in the laboratory. After the first questioning he did not seem curious regarding the achievement. The other wondered. Oh, well, he would feel better and congratulate him tomorrow. He was sometimes like that. Sometimes a poor sport.

The elder slowly went over his notes. Sometimes he stared out of the window and fought a hideous temptation. His brother came in and worked at his desk. The other's eyes rested upon his back. It would be so easy! To hide and explain it. No, he must not think of such a thing. His hands clenched until the knuckles showed white.

Some time later the younger arose, said good-night, and went to his room. Could he do it? A madness came upon him. He bided his time.

Several hours later the door to the brother's room opened and a tall dark figure entered. A knife makes no sound, and it was soon over.

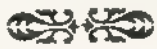
The dirt basement provided a good burial ground. He washed his hands, a maniacal gleam of satisfaction in his eyes. Better go up to the room again and make sure that there were no blood-spots. People that make sudden trips to the city and disappear do not leave blood-spots on their beds. Oh, he would be clever! . . .

The room was soon put in order. As he was leaving he felt a sudden chill. His brother's old sweater was hanging on the bedpost. Callously he put it on. Mustn't catch cold. Now for those notes.

Carefully, methodically, he transcribed them into his own handwriting. His scientific training triumphed over his madness for the time being. He was again the chemist.

As he worked, life stirred. Life in the pocket of the old sweater. A hairy leg reached for the edge of the pocket. Perhaps it was the heat of the man's body. Slowly the revolting creature worked its way up the sweater. The man wrote on. Inch by inch the hairy legs reached toward the collar, unnoticed. Then, for some reason, the spider turned. On the under side of his arm it worked, swaying with the motion of the writing. It continued testing its way. On the edge of the cuff it paused, then lowered itself onto the moving hand. The man dropped the pencil with an oath. The next second a long shiver ran over him, the blood drained from his face, the pupils of his eyes become pinpricks. . . .

DAYS later the villagers found him. Dead, staring, two tiny red spots on his hand, the evidence of his attempted theft in front of him.



A Brief Weird Story

Malchior Makes Magic

By CHARLES HENRY MACKINTOSH

THRICE thirteen in number were the worn stone slabs leading downward to the massive metal door of the underworld dwelling where Malchior made his dreadful magic.

Envis, later named The Unlucky, counted them carefully as he stepped slowly from one to the next; not that he needed to know the number, but because the counting kept his mind from his mission.

He stood on the thirty-ninth slab to study the metal door. It was rust-red, channeled with green slime, neither noteworthy nor cheering, but Envis examined it with sustained regard. His pulse-beats pounded out the passing moments into thin strips of eternity, while the consciousness grew in his sixth sense that he was no longer alone in his watchfulness: someone—or some *thing*—was watching him, from behind all that massiveness of metal! The conviction carried his hand to his sword hilt, though he remained sufficiently aware of his situation not to draw the weapon, but to strike its heavy hilt against the door. The blow left a deep mark, perceptible even in that dimness, but the sound was dull and reluctant. He would have struck again, and harder, but he perceived that the door had dissolved, or slid away along hidden grooves; and the darkness beyond seemed more dreadful than the door.

Dank air rushed out upon him and pressed a thousand ice-cold lips against his skin. He would have fled; but a bobbing light appeared somewhere at the back of the blackness, bobbing as lanterns bob when they are borne by men, and the familiar sight restored a little of his subconscious courage.

A purring growl came nearer with the light, but soon resolved itself into very ordinary complaints, such as servitors make when roused from their warm couches by untimely visitors.

The mysteries of Malchior were not well served by this one, who acted all too much as ordinary humans act; he should have been trained in the demoniacal manner, thought Envis; but both the thought and the returning courage which inspired it were stricken from him as the light illuminated the face: green-tusked, red-eyed, drooping-eared, dreadful as a bloodshot dream!

"I—I—I seek your Master!" Envis stammered.

Cryptically enough came the answer: "Many seek; few find:—but follow!"

The voice, at least, was human. Envis followed, feeling with a foot before him and then throwing forward his weight; till the light lit up another door. His guide tapped against this with a hammer so tiny that the sound of its stroke fell silent almost before it could come into the ears of Envis, where he stood at sword's

length behind; yet the guide seemed satisfied, for he put up the hammer, grunted "Wait here!" and was gone, light and all, swallowed up in darkness.

Again the moving air chilled him and warned that this door, too, had melted into darkness; but Malchior well knew the value of suspense, and for several seconds the silence worked for him upon his visitor's network of nerves.

Just before dread would change into courage, came a voice, deep, booming, and beautiful: "Set your sword at your feet, step over it, and enter!"

So—Malchior was human enough to fear a weapon in the hand of a warrior? The darkness seemed to catch the thought and boomed back a contemptuous answer: "Weapons can not serve you here, but unless you believe that, you may not enter, and *if* you believe it, you will set your sword at your feet, step over it, and enter!"

Envis obeyed, took three or four steps, and stood again, while the darkness lessened; for, though there was still no light, the darkness did lessen.

Suddenly he was aware of two eyes regarding him from a point some distance before him, at his own height above eye-level. The eyes were like large, living opals, green and blue, with sudden shifts, shot through with orange fire; and though they held him like giant hands, still he was aware that a face was forming round those eyes in the darkness; first the grizzled eyebrows, then a huge, bulbous dome above, and a hawk nose beneath; finally a slow-forming cataract of silvery hair falling over the mouth and trailing down into the darkness.

Nothing more than that face, cruel and cunning and powerful, with a force that was insistently felt, did Envis see while he remained, except later for just a moment, a slender-fingered hand of old ivory which reached him things that he shuddered to take, things for which he had come that dreadful journey; and then, after he had them, the hand vanished like a blown torch.

"Within three days," the great voice boomed at him when he had the things, "your enemy will be dead."

"But—but you know not even the *name* of mine enemy as yet: how can you slay him for me if you know not whom to slay?"

"*I* to slay your enemy?" answered the voice with mocking astonishment. "I, a priest of Beel? No, it is *yourself* who will slay—thus: hear now and remember: when you are again in your own place——"

Envis had a momentary heartsick vision of his cozy quarters.

"In your own place on the night of the third day from this, you will take that lump of tallow: yes, it is only tallow, although 'tis true that it was sweated from the fat flesh of one who had just died with the king's stake piercing up into his entrails; but it is just tallow: take it and knead it in the warmth of your hands and begin to shape it, however roughly, into human form, into the form of your foe; and, as you shape each part you will pronounce his name and say: 'This is the head of such a one, and these his eyes, and this his nose, and here his mouth, and now his neck, his breasts, his loins, his thighs,—and so till you have shaped the whole. Then, in the midst of the belly, you will make the mark of the navel; and when that is done, all is ready. Take then that tiny dart of gold between forefinger and thumb and, when you have recited the whole of the Curse which is pictured plainly for you upon the parchment, plunge the dart into the navel of your enemy and press it out of sight in the tallow. Then fling all into the brazier and repeat the Curse quickly while the flame blazes."

"And mine enemy——?"

"Your enemy will feel the dart enter his entrails; he will die before dawn!"

"And, on the day following, I shall be the king's——?"

"Stop! Tell me not to what place of power you aspire. It would be to name your enemy, and I must not hear his name. A priest of Beel slays not save as Beel slays, unknowing and uncaring, simply placing the weapon in a hand of hatred. Now, leave your gift and go!"

Envis dropped the bag of gold at his feet, where it fell on the rock floor and rang true to its metal; and turned away to find the ghoul-faced guide awaiting him with the lantern outside the hall of darkness where the luminous face already was fading from sight behind him.

Foul as was the air of the way of thrice thirteen steps, he drew deep, sobbing breaths of it as he darted up and away.

Far behind him the outer door had closed; and the guide, after removing his ghoul's mask, grumbled his way back to his Master.

"Bastiff," boomed the voice of Malchior, "whose place does Envis covet? Is it known in the markets?"

"It is the mock of the markets: three days ago, when the captain of the King's Guard was slain by the worm that bites in the dark, Fornito, named The Fortunate, fell into it by a shrewd trick of his tongue, though Envis has been second officer for full five years!"

"To the market-places at dawn, then; and let it be whispered about that *Envis has gotten a death-charm from Malchior!*"

For the full three days, while the whisperings went from mouth to ear all through the city, Envis kept the tallow and the dart and the parchment secreted on his person, though their tiny bulk pressed against him with the weight of a pyramid.

On the evening of the third day, however, he took them out, still wrapped in the parchment, weighted the package with a stone, and threw it far into the waters of the harbor; for, at heart, Envis was a decent enough fellow, though proud and passionate.

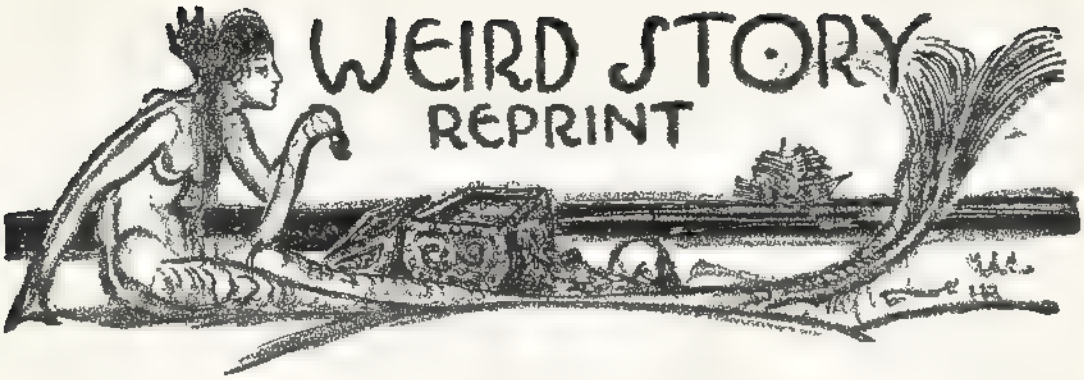
It was the evening of the day following, when Bastiff brought his news from the market-places to the ears of his Master:

"Fornito died at midnight, his entrails torn by the worm that bites in the dark."

"And what of Envis?"

"Even now, Envis writhes on the King's stake; for the whole city said of him: *'Envis has gotten a death-charm from Malchior!'* and the King was very fond of Fornito."

"Ah!" said Malchior. "But even the King fears Malchior! Did you put the gold in the deep cavern?"



Rappaccini's Daughter

By NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

A YOUNG man, named Giovanni Guasconti, came, very long ago, from the more southern region of Italy, to pursue his studies at the University of Padua. Giovanni, who had but a scanty supply of gold ducats in his pocket, took lodgings in a high and gloomy chamber of an old edifice which looked not unworthy to have been the palace of a Paduan noble, and which, in fact, exhibited over its entrance the armorial bearings of a family long since extinct. The young stranger, who was not unstudied in the great poem of his country, recollected that one of the ancestors of this family, and perhaps an occupant of this very mansion, had been pictured by Dante as a partaker of the immortal agonies of his Inferno. These reminiscences and associations, together with the tendency to heartbreak natural to a young man for the first time out of his native sphere, caused Giovanni to sigh heavily as he looked around the desolate and ill-furnished apartment.

"Holy Virgin, signor!" cried old Dame Lisabetta, who, won by the youth's remarkable beauty of person, was kindly endeavoring to give the chamber a habitable air, "what a sigh was that to come out of a young man's heart! Do you find this old mansion gloomy? For the love of Heaven, then, put your head out of the window, and you will see as bright sunshine as you have left in Naples."

Guasconti mechanically did as the old woman advised, but could not quite agree with her that the Paduan sunshine was as cheerful as that of southern Italy. Such as it was, however, it fell upon a garden beneath the window and expended its fostering influences on a variety of plants, which seemed to have been cultivated with exceeding care.

"Does this garden belong to the house?" asked Giovanni.

"Heaven forbid, signor, unless it were fruitful of better pot herbs than any that grow there now," answered old Lisabetta. "No; that garden is cultivated by the own hands of Signor Giacomo Rappaccini, the famous doctor, who, I warrant him, has been heard of as far as Naples. It is said that he distils these plants into medicines that are as potent as a charm. Oftentimes you may see the signor doctor at work, and perchance the signora, his daughter, too, gathering the strange flowers that grow in the garden."

The old woman had now done what she could for the aspect of the chamber; and, commending the young man

to the protection of the saints, took her departure.

Giovanni still found no better occupation than to look down into the garden beneath his window. From its appearance, he judged it to be one of those botanic gardens which were of earlier date in Padua than elsewhere in Italy or in the world. Or, not improbably, it might once have been the pleasure-place of an opulent family; for there was the ruin of a marble fountain in the center, sculptured with rare art, but so wofully shattered that it was impossible to trace the original design from the chaos of remaining fragments. The water, however, continued to gush and sparkle into the sunbeams as cheerfully as ever. A little gurgling sound ascended to the young man's window and made him feel as if the fountain were an immortal spirit, that sung its song unceasingly and without heeding the vicissitudes around it, while one century imbodied it in marble and another scattered the perishable garniture on the soil. All about the pool into which the water subsided grew various plants, that seemed to require a plentiful supply of moisture for the nourishment of gigantic leaves, and, in some instances, flowers gorgeously magnificent. There was one shrub in particular, set in a marble vase in the midst of the pool, that bore a profusion of purple blossoms, each of which had the luster and richness of a gem; and the whole together made a show so resplendent that it seemed enough to illuminate the garden, even had there been no sunshine. Every portion of the soil was peopled with plants and herbs, which, if less beautiful, still bore tokens of assiduous care, as if all had their individual virtues, known to the scientific mind that fostered them. Some were placed in urns, rich with old carving, and others in common garden pots; some crept serpent-like along the ground or climbed on high, using whatever means of ascent was offered them. One plant had wreathed itself around a statue of Vertumnus, which was thus quite veiled and shrouded in a drapery of hanging foliage, so happily arranged that it might have served a sculptor for a study.

While Giovanni stood at the window he heard a rustling behind a screen of leaves, and became aware that a person was at work in the garden. His figure soon emerged into view, and showed itself to be that of no common laborer, but a tall, emaciated, sallow, and sickly-looking man, dressed in a scholar's garb of black. He was beyond the middle term of life, with gray hair, a thin, gray beard, and a face singularly marked with intellect and cultivation, but which could never, even in his more youthful days, have expressed much warmth of heart.

Nothing could exceed the intentness with which this scientific gardener examined every shrub which grew in his path: it seemed as if he was looking into their inmost nature, making observations in regard to their creative essence, and discovering why one leaf grew in this shape and another in that, and wherefore such and such flowers differed among themselves in hue and perfume. Nevertheless, in spite of this deep intelligence on his part, there was no approach to intimacy between himself and these vegetable existences. On the contrary, he avoided their actual touch or the direct inhaling of their odors with a caution that impressed Giovanni most disagreeably; for the man's demeanor was that of one walking among malignant influences, such as savage beasts, or deadly snakes, or evil spirits, which, should he allow them one moment of license, would wreak upon him some terrible fatality. It was strangely frightful to the young man's imagination to see this air of insecurity in a person cultivating a garden, that most simple and innocent of human toils, and which

had been alike the joy and labor of the unfallen parents of the race. Was this garden, then, the Eden of the present world? And this man, with such a perception of harm in what his own hands caused to grow,—was he the Adam?

The distrustful gardener, while plucking away the dead leaves or pruning the too luxuriant growth of the shrubs, defended his hands with a pair of thick gloves. Nor were these his only armor. When, in his walk through the garden, he came to the magnificent plant that hung its purple gems beside the marble fountain, he placed a kind of mask over his mouth and nostrils, as if all this beauty did but conceal a deadlier malice; but, finding his task still too dangerous, he drew back, removed the mask, and called loudly, but in the infirm voice of a person affected with inward disease,—

"Beatrice! Beatrice!"

"Here am I, my father. What would you?" cried a rich and youthful voice from a window of the opposite house—a voice as rich as a tropical sunset, and which made Giovanni, though he knew not why, think of deep hues of purple or crimson and of perfumes heavily delectable. "Are you in the garden?"

"Yes, Beatrice," answered the gardener; "and I need your help."

Soon there emerged from under a sculptured portal the figure of a young girl, arrayed with as much richness of taste as the most splendid of the flowers, beautiful as the day, and with a bloom so deep and vivid that one shade more would have been too much. She looked redundant with life, health, and energy; all of which attributes were bound down and compressed, as it were, and girdled tensely, in their luxuriance, by her virgin zone. Yet Giovanni's fancy must have grown morbid while he looked down into the garden; for the impression which the fair stranger made upon him was as if here were another flower, the human sister of those vegetable ones, as beautiful as they, more beautiful than the richest of them, but still to be touched only with a glove, nor to be approached without a mask. As Beatrice came down the garden path, it was observable that she handled and inhaled the odor of several of the plants which her father had most sedulously avoided.

"Here, Beatrice," said the latter, "see how many needful offices require to be done to our chief treasure. Yet, shattered as I am, my life might pay the penalty of approaching it so closely as circumstances demand. Henceforth, I fear, this plant must be consigned to your sole charge."

"And gladly will I undertake it," cried again the rich tones of the young lady, as she bent towards the magnificent plant and opened her arms as if to embrace it. "Yes, my sister, my splendor, it shall be Beatrice's task to nurse and serve thee; and thou shalt reward her with thy kisses and perfumed breath, which to her is as the breath of life."

Then, with all the tenderness in her manner that was so strikingly expressed in her words, she busied herself with such attentions as the plant seemed to require; and Giovanni, at his lofty window, rubbed his eyes, and almost doubted whether it were a girl tending her favorite flower, or one sister performing the duties of affection to another. The scene soon terminated. Whether Dr. Rappaccini had finished his labors in the garden, or that his watchful eye had caught the stranger's face, he now took his daughter's arm and retired. Night was already closing in; oppressive exhalations seemed to proceed from the plants and steal upward past the open window; and Giovanni, closing the lattice, went to his couch and dreamed of a rich flower and beautiful girl. Flowers and maiden were different, and yet the same, and fraught with some strange peril in either shape.

But there is an influence in the light of morning that tends to rectify whatever errors of fancy, or even of judgment, we may have incurred during the sun's decline, or among the shadows of the night, or in the less wholesome glow of moonshine. Giovanni's first movement, on starting from sleep, was to throw open the window and gaze down into the garden which his dreams had made so fertile of mysteries. He was surprized, and a little ashamed, to find how real and matter-of-fact an affair it proved to be, in the first rays of the sun which gilded the dewdrops that hung upon leaf and blossom, and, while giving a brighter beauty to each rare flower, brought everything within the limits of ordinary experience. The young man rejoiced that, in the heart of the barren city, he had the privilege of overlooking this spot of lovely and luxuriant vegetation. It would serve, he said to himself, as a symbolic language to keep him in communion with Nature. Neither the sickly and thoughtworn Dr. Giacomo Rappaccini, it is true, nor his brilliant daughter, were now visible; so that Giovanni could not determine how much of the singularity which he attributed to both was due to their own qualities and how much to his wonder-working fancy; but he was inclined to take a most rational view of the whole matter.

In the course of the day he paid his respects to Signor Pietro Baglioni, professor of medicine in the university, a physician of eminent repute, to whom Giovanni had brought a letter of introduction. The professor was an elderly personage, apparently of genial nature and habits that might almost be called jovial. He kept the young man to dinner, and made himself very agreeable by the freedom and liveliness of his conversation, especially when warmed by a flask or two of Tuscan wine. Giovanni, conceiving that men of science, inhabitants of the same city, must needs be on familiar terms with one another, took an opportunity to mention the name of Dr. Rappaccini. But the professor did not respond with so much cordiality as he had anticipated.

"Ill would it become a teacher of the divine art of medicine," said Professor Pietro Baglioni, in answer to a question of Giovanni, "to withhold due and well-considered praise of a physician so eminently skilled as Rappaccini; but, on the other hand, I should answer it but scantily to my conscience were I to permit a worthy youth like yourself, Signor Giovanni, the son of an ancient friend, to imbibe erroneous ideas respecting a man who might hereafter chance to hold your life and death in his hands. The truth is, our worshipful Dr. Rappaccini has as much science as any member of the faculty—with perhaps one single exception—in Padua, or all Italy; but there are certain grave objections to his professional character."

"And what are they?" asked the young man.

"Has my friend Giovanni any disease of body or heart, that he is so inquisitive about physicians?" said the professor, with a smile. "But as for Rappaccini, it is said of him—and I, who know the man well, can answer for its truth—that he cares infinitely more for science than for mankind. His patients are interesting to him only as subjects of some new experiment. He would sacrifice human life, his own among the rest, or whatever else was dearest to him, for the sake of adding so much as a grain of mustard seed to the great heap of his accumulated knowledge."

"Methinks he is an awful man indeed," remarked Guasconti, mentally recalling the cold and purely intellectual aspect of Rappaccini. "And yet, worshipful professor, is it not a noble spirit? Are there many men capable of so spiritual a love of science?"

"God forbid," answered the professor, somewhat testily; "at least, unless they take sounder views of the healing art than those adopted by Rappaccini. It is his theory that all medicinal virtues are comprised within those substances which we term vegetable poisons. These he cultivates with his own hands, and is said even to have produced new varieties of poison, more horribly deleterious than Nature, without the assistance of this learned person, would ever have plagued the world withal. That the signor doctor does less mischief than might be expected with such dangerous substances, is undeniable. Now and then, it must be owned, he has effected, or seemed to effect, a marvelous cure; but, to tell you my private mind, Signor Giovanni, he should receive little credit for such instances of success—they being probably the work of chance—but should be held strictly accountable for his failures, which may justly be considered his own work."

The youth might have taken Baglioni's opinions with many grains of allowance had he known that there was a professional warfare of long continuance between him and Dr. Rappaccini, in which the latter was generally thought to have gained the advantage. If the reader be inclined to judge for himself, we refer him to certain black-letter tracts on both sides, preserved in the medical department of the University of Padua.

"I know not, most learned professor," returned Giovanni, after musing on what had been said of Rappaccini's exclusive zeal for science—"I know not how dearly this physician may love his art; but surely there is one object more dear to him. He has a daughter."

"Aha!" cried the professor, with a laugh. "So now our friend Giovanni's secret is out. You have heard of this daughter, whom all the young men in Padua are wild about, though not half a dozen have ever had the good hap to see her face. I know little of the Signora Beatrice save that Rappaccini is said to have instructed her deeply in his science, and that, young and beautiful as fame reports her, she is already qualified to fill a professor's chair. Perchance her father destines her for mine! Other absurd rumors there be, not worth talking about or listening to. So now, Signor Giovanni, drink off your glass of lachryma."

Guasconti returned to his lodgings somewhat heated with the wine he had quaffed, and which caused his brain to swim with strange fantasies in reference to Dr. Rappaccini and the beautiful Beatrice. On his way, happening to pass by a florist's, he bought a fresh bouquet of flowers.

Ascending to his chamber, he seated himself near the window, but within the shadow thrown by the depth of the wall, so that he could look down into the garden with little risk of being discovered. All beneath his eye was a solitude. The strange plants were basking in the sunshine, and now and then nodding gently to one another, as if in acknowledgment of sympathy and kindred. In the midst, by the shattered fountain, grew the magnificent shrub, with its purple gems clustering all over it; they glowed in the air, and gleamed back again out of the depth of the pool, which thus seemed to overflow with colored radiance from the rich reflection that was steeped in it. At first, as we have said, the garden was a solitude. Soon, however—as Giovanni had half hoped, half feared, would be the case—a figure appeared beneath the antique sculptural portal, and came down between the rows of plants, inhaling their various perfumes as if she were one of those beings of old classic fable that lived upon sweet odors. On again beholding Beatrice, the young man was even startled to perceive how much her beauty exceeded his recollection of it;

so brilliant, so vivid, was its character, that she glowed amid the sunlight, and, as Giovanni whispered to himself, positively illuminated the more shadowy intervals of the garden path. Her face being now more revealed than on the former occasion, he was struck by its expression of simplicity and sweetness—qualities that had not entered into his idea of her character, and which made him ask anew what manner of mortal she might be. Nor did he fail again to observe, or imagine, an analogy between the beautiful girl and the gorgeous shrub that hung its gemlike flowers over the fountain—a resemblance which Beatrice seemed to have indulged a fantastic humor in heightening, both by the arrangement of her dress and the selection of its hues.

Approaching the shrub, she threw open her arms, as with a passionate ardor, and drew its branches into an intimate embrace—so intimate that her features were hidden in its leafy bosom and her glistening ringlets all intermingled with the flowers.

"Give me thy breath, my sister," exclaimed Beatrice, "for I am faint with common air. And give me this flower of thine, which I separate with gentlest fingers from the stem and place close beside my heart."

With these words the beautiful daughter of Rappaccini plucked one of the richest blossoms of the shrub, and was about to fasten it in her bosom. But now, unless Giovanni's drafts of wine had bewildered his senses, a singular incident occurred. A small orange-colored reptile, of a lizard or chameleon species, chanced to be creeping along the path, just at the feet of Beatrice. It appeared to Giovanni—but, at the distance from which he gazed, he could scarcely have seen anything so minute—it appeared to him, however, that a drop or two of moisture from the broken stem of the flower descended upon the lizard's head. For an instant the reptile contorted itself violently, and then lay motionless in the sunshine. Beatrice observed this remarkable phenomenon, and crossed herself, sadly, but without surprize; nor did she therefore hesitate to arrange the fatal flower in her bosom. There it blushed, and almost glimmered with the dazzling effect of a precious stone, adding to her dress and aspect the one appropriate charm which nothing else in the world could have supplied. But Giovanni, out of the shadow of his window, bent forward and shrank back, and murmured and trembled.

"Am I awake? Have I my senses?" said he to himself. "What is this being? Beautiful shall I call her, or inexpressibly terrible?"

Beatrice now strayed carelessly through the garden, approaching closer beneath Giovanni's window, so that he was compelled to thrust his head quite out of its concealment in order to gratify the intense and painful curiosity which she excited. At this moment there came a beautiful insect over the garden wall: it had, perhaps, wandered through the city, and found no flowers or verdure among those antique haunts of men until the heavy perfumes of Dr. Rappaccini's shrubs had lured it from afar. Without alighting on the flowers, this winged brightness seemed to be attracted by Beatrice, and lingered in the air and fluttered about her head. Now, here it could not be but that Giovanni Guasconti's eyes deceived him. Be that as it might, he fancied that, while Beatrice was gazing at the insect with childish delight, it grew faint and fell at her feet; its bright wings shivered; it was dead—from no cause that he could discern, unless it were the atmosphere of her breath. Again Beatrice crossed herself and sighed heavily as she bent over the dead insect.

An impulsive movement of Giovanni drew her eyes to the window. There she beheld the beautiful head of the young man—rather a Grecian than an Italian head, with fair, reg-

ular features, and a glistening of gold among his ringlets—gazing down upon her like a being that hovered in mid air. Scarcely knowing what he did, Giovanni threw down the bouquet which he had hitherto held in his hand.

"Signora," said he, "there are pure and healthful flowers. Wear them for the sake of Giovanni Guasconti."

"Thanks, signor," replied Beatrice, with her rich voice, that came forth as it were like a gush of music, and with a mirthful expression half childish and half womanlike. "I accept your gift, and would fain recompense it with this precious purple flower; but, if I toss it into the air, it will not reach you. So Signor Guasconti must even content himself with my thanks."

She lifted the bouquet from the ground, and then, as if inwardly ashamed at having stepped aside from her maiden reserve to respond to a stranger's greeting, passed swiftly homeward through the garden. But, few as the moments were, it seemed to Giovanni, when she was on the point of vanishing beneath the sculptured portal, that his beautiful bouquet was already beginning to wither in her grasp. It was an idle thought; there could be no possibility of distinguishing a faded flower from a fresh one at so great a distance.

For many days after this incident the young man avoided the window that looked into Dr. Rappaccini's garden, as if something ugly and monstrous would have blasted his eyesight had he been betrayed into a glance. He felt conscious of having put himself, to a certain extent, within the influence of an unintelligible power by the communication which he had opened with Beatrice. The wisest course would have been, if his heart were in any real danger, to quit his lodgings and Padua itself at once; the next wiser, to have accustomed himself, as far as possible, to the familiar and daylight view of Beatrice—thus bringing her rigidly and systematically within the limits of ordinary experience. Least of all, while avoiding her sight, ought Giovanni to have remained so near this extraordinary being that the proximity and possibility even of intercourse should give a kind of substance and reality to the wild vagaries which his imagination ran riot continually in producing. Guasconti had not a deep heart—or, at all events, its depths were not sounded now; but he had a quick fancy, and an ardent southern temperament, which rose every instant to a higher fever pitch. Whether or no Beatrice possessed those terrible attributes, that fatal breath, the affinity with those so beautiful and deadly flowers which were indicated by what Giovanni had witnessed, she had at least instilled a fierce and subtle poison into his system. It was not love, although her rich beauty was a madness to him; nor horror, even while he fancied her spirit to be imbued with the same baneful essence that seemed to pervade her physical frame; but a wild offspring of both love and horror that had each parent in it, and burned like one and shivered like the other. Giovanni knew not what to dread; still less did he know what to hope; yet hope and dread kept a continual warfare in his breast, alternately vanquishing one another and starting up afresh to renew the contest. Blessed are all simple emotions, be they dark or bright! It is the lurid intermixture of the two that produces the illuminating blaze of the infernal regions.

Sometimes he endeavored to assuage the fever of his spirit by a rapid walk through the streets of Padua or beyond its gates: his footsteps kept time with the throbbing of his brain, so that the walk was apt to accelerate itself to a race. One day he found himself arrested; his arm was seized by a portly personage, who had turned back on recognizing the young

man and expended much breath in overtaking him.

"Signor Giovanni! Stay, my young friend!" cried he. "Have you forgotten me? That might well be the case if I were as much altered as yourself."

It was Baglioni, whom Giovanni had avoided ever since the first meeting, from a doubt that the professor's sagacity would look too deeply into his secrets. Endeavoring to recover himself, he stared forth wildly from his inner world into the outer one and spoke like a man in a dream.

"Yes; I am Giovanni Guasconti. You are Professor Pietro Baglioni. Now let me pass!"

"Not yet, not yet, Signor Giovanni Guasconti," said the professor, smiling, but at the same time scrutinizing the youth with an earnest glance. "What! did I grow up side by side with your father? and shall his son pass me like a stranger in these old streets of Padua? Stand still, Signor Giovanni; for we must have a word or two before we part."

"Speedily, then, most worshipful professor, speedily," said Giovanni, with feverish impatience. "Does not your worship see that I am in haste?"

Now, while he was speaking there came a man in black along the street, stooping and moving feebly like a person in inferior health. His face was all overspread with a most sickly and sallow hue, but yet so pervaded with an expression of piercing and active intellect that an observer might easily have overlooked the merely physical attributes and have seen only this wonderful energy. As he passed, this person exchanged a cold and distant salutation with Baglioni, but fixed his eyes upon Giovanni with an intentness that seemed to bring out whatever was within him worthy of notice. Nevertheless, there was a peculiar quietness in the look, as if taking merely a speculative, not a human, interest in the young man.

"It is Dr. Rappaccini!" whispered the professor when the stranger had passed. "Has he ever seen your face before?"

"Not that I know," answered Giovanni, starting at the name.

"He *has* seen you! he must have seen you!" said Baglioni, hastily. "For some purpose or other, this man of science is making a study of you. I know that look of his! It is the same that coldly illuminates his face as he bends over a bird, a mouse, or a butterfly, which, in pursuance of some experiment, he has killed by the perfume of a flower; a look as deep as Nature itself, but without Nature's warmth of love. Signor Giovanni, I will stake my life upon it, you are the subject of one of Rappaccini's experiments!"

"Will you make a fool of me?" cried Giovanni, passionately. "*That*, signor professor, were an untoward experiment."

"Patience! patience!" replied the imperturbable professor. "I tell thee, my poor Giovanni, that Rappaccini has a scientific interest in thee. Thou hast fallen into fearful hands! And the Signora Beatrice—what part does she act in this mystery?"

But Guasconti, finding Baglioni's pertinacity intolerable, here broke away, and was gone before the professor could again seize his arm. He looked after the young man intently and shook his head.

"This must not be," said Baglioni to himself. "The youth is the son of my old friend, and shall not come to any harm from which the arcana of medical science can preserve him. Besides, it is too insufferable an impertinence in Rappaccini thus to snatch the lad out of my own hands, as I may say, and make use of him for his infernal experiments. This daughter of his! It shall be looked to. Perchance, most learned Rappaccini, I may foil you where you little dream of it!"

Meanwhile Giovanni had pursued a circuitous route, and at length found himself at the door of his lodgings. As he crossed the threshold he was met by old Lisabetta, who smirked and smiled, and was evidently desirous to attract his attention; vainly, however, as the ebullition of his feelings had momentarily subsided into a cold and dull vacuity. He turned his eyes full upon the withered face that was puckering itself into a smile, but seemed to behold it not. The old dame, therefore, laid her grasp upon his cloak.

"Signor! signor!" whispered she, still with a smile over the whole breadth of her visage, so that it looked not unlike a grotesque carving in wood, darkened by centuries. "Listen, signor! There is a private entrance into the garden!"

"What do you say?" exclaimed Giovanni, turning quickly about, as if an inanimate thing should start into feverish life. "A private entrance into Dr. Rappaccini's garden?"

"Hush! hush! not so loud!" whispered Lisabetta, putting her hand over his mouth. "Yes; into the worshipful doctor's garden, where you may see all his fine shrubbery. Many a young man in Padua would give gold to be admitted among those flowers."

Giovanni put a piece of gold in her hand.

"Show me the way," said he.

A surmise, probably excited by his conversation with Baglioni, crossed his mind, that this interposition of old Lisabetta might perchance be connected with the intrigue, whatever were its nature, in which the professor seemed to suppose that Dr. Rappaccini was involving him. But such a suspicion, though it disturbed Giovanni, was inadequate to restrain him. The instant that he was aware of the possibility of approaching Beatrice, it seemed an absolute necessity of his existence to do so. It mattered not whether she were angel or demon; he was irrevocably within her sphere, and must obey the law that whirled him onward, in everlasting circles, toward a result which he did not attempt to foreshadow; and yet, strange to say, there came across him a sudden doubt whether this intense interest on his part were not delusory; whether it were really of so deep and positive a nature as to justify him in thrusting himself into an incalculable position; whether it were not merely the fantasy of a young man's brain, only slightly or not at all connected with his heart.

He paused, hesitated, turned half about, but again went on. His withered guide led him along several obscure passages, and finally undid a door, through which, as it was opened, there came the sight and sound of rustling leaves, with the broken sunshine glimmering among them. Giovanni stepped forth, and, forcing himself through the entanglement of a shrub that wreathed its tendrils over the hidden entrance, stood beneath his own window in the open area of Dr. Rappaccini's garden.

How often is it the case that, when impossibilities have come to pass and dreams have condensed their misty substance into tangible realities, we find ourselves calm, and even coldly self-possessed, amid circumstances which it would have been a delirium of joy or agony to anticipate! Fate delights to thwart us thus. Passion will choose his own time to rush upon the scene, and lingers sluggishly behind when an appropriate adjustment of events would seem to summon his appearance. So was it now with Giovanni. Day after day his pulses had throbbed with feverish blood at the improbable idea of an interview with Beatrice, and of standing with her, face to face, in this very garden, basking in the Oriental sunshine of her beauty, and snatching from her full gaze the mystery which he deemed the riddle of his own existence. But now there was a singular and un-

timely equanimity within his breast. He threw a glance around the garden to discover if Beatrice or her father were present, and, perceiving that he was alone, began a critical observation of the plants.

The aspect of one and all of them dissatisfied him, their gorgeousness seemed fierce, passionate, and even unnatural. There was hardly an individual shrub which a wanderer, straying by himself through a forest, would not have been startled to find growing wild, as if an unearthly face had glared at him out of the thicket. Several also would have shocked a delicate instinct by an appearance of artificialness indicating that there had been such commixture, and, as it were, adultery of various vegetable species, that the production was no longer of God's making, but the monstrous offspring of man's depraved fancy, glowing with only an evil mockery of beauty. They were probably the result of experiment, which in one or two cases had succeeded in mingling plants individually lovely into a compound possessing the questionable and ominous character that distinguished the whole growth of the garden. In fine, Giovanni recognized but two or three plants in the collection, and those of a kind that he well knew to be poisonous. While busy with these contemplations he heard the rustling of a silken garment, and, turning, beheld Beatrice emerging from beneath the sculptured portal.

Giovanni had not considered with himself what should be his deportment; whether he should apologize for his intrusion into the garden, or assume that he was there with the privity at least, if not by the desire, of Dr. Rappaccini or his daughter; but Beatrice's manner placed him at his ease, though leaving him still in doubt by what agency he had gained admittance. She came lightly along the path and met him near the broken fountain. There was surprize in her face, but brightened by a simple and kind expression of pleasure.

"You are a connoisseur in flowers, signor," said Beatrice, with a smile, alluding to the bouquet which he had flung her from the window. "It is no marvel, therefore, if the sight of my father's rare collection has tempted you to take a nearer view. If he were here, he could tell you many strange and interesting facts as to the nature and habits of these shrubs; for he has spent a lifetime in such studies, and this garden is his world."

"And yourself, lady," observed Giovanni, "if fame say true—you likewise are deeply skilled in the virtues indicated by these rich blossoms and these spicy perfumes. Would you deign to be my instructress, I should prove an apter scholar than if taught by Signor Rappaccini himself."

"Are there such idle rumors?" asked Beatrice, with the music of a pleasant laugh. "Do people say that I am skilled in my father's science of plants? What a jest is there! No; though I have grown up among these flowers, I know no more of them than their hues and perfume; and sometimes methinks I would fain rid myself of even that small knowledge. There are many flowers here, and those not the least brilliant, that shock and offend me when they meet my eye. But pray, signor, do not believe these stories about my science. Believe nothing of me save what you see with your own eyes."

"And must I believe all that I have seen with my own eyes?" asked Giovanni, pointedly, while the recollection of former scenes made him shrink. "No, signora; you demand too little of me. Bid me believe nothing save what comes from your own lips."

It would appear that Beatrice understood him. There came a deep flush to her cheek; but she looked full into Giovanni's eyes, and responded to his gaze of uneasy suspicion with a queenlike haughtiness.

"I do so bid you, signor," she replied. "Forget whatever you may have fancied in regard to me. If true to the outward senses, still it may be false in its essence; but the words of Beatrice Rappaccini's lips art true from the depths of the heart outward. Those you may believe."

A fervor glowed in her whole aspect and beamed upon Giovanni's consciousness like the light of truth itself; but while she spoke there was a fragrance in the atmosphere around her, rich and delightful, though evanescent, yet which the young man, from an indefinable reluctance, scarcely dared to draw into his lungs. It might be the odor of the flowers. Could it be Beatrice's breath which thus embalmed her words with a strange richness, as if by steeping them in her heart? A faintness passed like a shadow over Giovanni and flitted away; he seemed to gaze through the beautiful girl's eyes into her transparent soul, and felt no more doubt or fear.

The tinge of passion that had colored Beatrice's manner vanished; she became gay, and appeared to derive a pure delight from her communion with the youth not unlike what the maiden of a lonely island might have felt conversing with a voyager from the civilized world. Evidently her experience of life had been confined within the limits of that garden. She talked now about matters as simple as the daylight of summer clouds, and now asked questions in reference to the city, or Giovanni's distant home, his friends, his mother, and his sisters —questions indicating such seclusion, and such lack of familiarity with modes and forms, that Giovanni responded as if to an infant. Her spirit gushed out before him like a fresh rill that was just catching its first glimpse of the sunlight and wondering at the reflections of earth and sky which were flung into its bosom. There came thoughts, too, from a deep source, and fantasies of a gemlike brilliancy, as if diamonds and rubies sparkled upward among the bubbles of the fountain. Ever and anon there gleamed across the young man's mind a sense of wonder that he should be walking side by side with the being who had so wrought upon his imagination, whom he had idealized in such hues of terror, in whom he had positively witnessed such manifestations of dreadful attributes—that he should be conversing with Beatrice like a brother, and should find her so human and so maidenlike. But such reflections were only momentary; the effect of her character was too real not to make itself familiar at once.

In this free intercourse they had strayed through the garden, and now, after many turns among its avenues, were come to the shattered fountain, beside which grew the magnificent shrub, with its treasury of glowing blossoms. A fragrance was diffused from it which Giovanni recognized as identical with that which he had attributed to Beatrice's breath, but incomparably more powerful. As her eyes fell upon it, Giovanni beheld her press her hand to her bosom as if her heart were throbbing suddenly and painfully.

"For the first time in my life," murmured she, addressing the shrub, "I had forgotten thee."

"I remember, signora," said Giovanni, "that you once promised to reward me with one of these living gems for the bouquet which I had the happy boldness to fling to your feet. Permit me now to pluck it as a memorial of this interview."

He made a step toward the shrub with extended hand; but Beatrice darted forward, uttering a shriek that went through his heart like a dagger. She caught his hand and drew it back with the whole force of her slender figure. Giovanni felt her touch thrilling through his fibers.

"Touch it not!" exclaimed she, in a voice of agony. "Not for thy life! It is fatal!"

Then, hiding her face, she fled from him and vanished beneath the sculptured portal. As Giovanni followed her with his eyes, he beheld the emaciated figure and pale intelligence of Dr. Rappaccini, who had been watching the scene, he knew not how long, within the shadow of the entrance.

No sooner was Guasconti alone in his chamber than the image of Beatrice came back to his passionate musings, invested with all the witchery that had been gathered around it ever since his first glimpse of her, and now likewise imbued with a tender warmth of girlish womanhood. She was human; her nature was endowed with all gentle and feminine qualities; she was worthiest to be worshiped; she was capable, surely, on her part, of the height and heroism of love. Those tokens which he had hitherto considered as proofs of a frightful peculiarity in her physical and moral system were now either forgotten or by the subtle sophistry of passion transmuted into a golden crown of enchantment, rendering Beatrice the more admirable by so much as she was the more unique. Whatever had looked ugly was now beautiful; or, if incapable of such a change, it stole away and hid itself among those shapeless half ideas which throng the dim region beyond the daylight of our perfect consciousness. Thus did he spend the night, nor fell asleep until the dawn had begun to awake the slumbering flowers in Dr. Rappaccini's garden, whither Giovanni's dreams doubtless led him. Up rose the sun in his due season, and, flinging his beams upon the young man's eyelids, awoke him to a sense of pain. When thoroughly aroused, he became sensible of a burning and tingling agony in his hand—in his right hand—the very hand which Beatrice had grasped in her own when he was on the point of plucking one of the gemlike flowers. On the back of that hand there was now a purple print like that of four small fingers, and the likeness of a slender thumb upon his wrist.

O, how stubbornly does love—or even that cunning semblance of love which flourishes in the imagination, but strikes no depth of root into the heart—how stubbornly does it hold its faith until the moment comes when it is doomed to vanish into thin mist! Giovanni wrapped a handkerchief about his hand and wondered what evil thing had stung him, and soon forgot his pain in a revery of Beatrice.

After the first interview, a second was in the inevitable course of what we call fate. A third; a fourth; and a meeting with Beatrice in the garden was no longer an incident in Giovanni's daily life, but the whole space in which he might be said to live; for the anticipation and memory of that ecstatic hour made up the remainder. Nor was it otherwise with the daughter of Rappaccini. She watched for the youth's appearance and flew to his side with confidence as unreserved as if they had been playmates from early infancy—as if they were such playmates still. If, by any unwonted chance, he failed to come at the appointed moment, she stood beneath the window and sent up the rich sweetness of her tones to float around him in his chamber and echo and reverberate throughout his heart: "Giovanni! Giovanni! Why tarriest thou? Come down!" And down he hastened into that Eden of poisonous flowers.

But, with all this intimate familiarity, there was still a reserve in Beatrice's demeanor, so rigidly and invariably sustained that the idea of infringing it scarcely occurred to his imagination. By all appreciable signs, they loved; they had looked love with eyes that conveyed the holy secret from the depths of one soul into the depths of the other, as if it were too

sacred to be whispered by the way; they had even spoken love in those gushes of passion when their spirits darted forth in articulated breath like tongues of long-hidden flame; and yet there had been no seal of lips, no clasp of hands, nor any slight caress such as love claims and hallows. He had never touched one of the gleaming ringlets of her hair; her garment—so marked was the physical barrier between them—had never been waved against him by a breeze. On the few occasions when Giovanni had seemed tempted to overstep the limit, Beatrice grew so sad, so stern, and withal wore such a look of desolate separation, shuddering at itself, that not a spoken word was requisite to repel him. At such times he was startled at the horrible suspicions that rose, monster-like, out of the caverns of his heart and stared him in the face; his love grew thin and faint as the morning mist; his doubts alone had substance. But, when Beatrice's face brightened again after the momentary shadow, she was transformed at once from the mysterious, questionable being whom he had watched with so much awe and horror; she was now the beautiful and unsophisticated girl whom he felt that his spirit knew with a certainty beyond all other knowledge.

A CONSIDERABLE time had now passed since Giovanni's last meeting with Baglioni. One morning, however, he was disagreeably surprized by a visit from the professor, whom he had scarcely thought of for whole weeks, and would willingly have forgotten still longer. Given up as he had long been to a pervading excitement, he could tolerate no companions except upon condition of their perfect sympathy with his present state of feeling. Such sympathy was not to be expected from Professor Baglioni.

The visitor chatted carelessly for a few moments about the gossip of the city and the university, and then took up another topic.

"I have been reading an old classic author lately," said he, "and met with a story that strangely interested me. Possibly you may remember it. It is of an Indian prince, who sent a beautiful woman as a present to Alexander the Great. She was as lovely as the dawn and gorgeous as the sunset; but what especially distinguished her was a certain rich perfume in her breath—richer than a garden of Persian roses. Alexander, as was natural to a youthful conqueror, fell in love at first sight with this magnificent stranger; but a certain sage physician, happening to be present, discovered a terrible secret in regard to her."

"And what was that?" asked Giovanni, turning his eyes downward to avoid those of the professor.

"That this lovely woman," continued Baglioni, with emphasis, "had been nourished with poisons from her birth upward, until her whole nature was so imbued with them that she herself had become the deadliest poison in existence. Poison was her element of life. With that rich perfume of her breath she blasted the very air. Her love would have been poison—her embrace death. Is not this a marvelous tale?"

"A childish fable," answered Giovanni, nervously starting from his chair. "I marvel how your worship finds time to read such nonsense among your grave studies."

"By the by," said the professor, looking uneasily about him, "what singular fragrance is this in your apartment? Is it the perfume of your gloves? It is faint, but delicious; and yet, after all, by no means agreeable. Were I to breathe it long, methinks it would make me ill. It is like the breath of a flower; but I see no flowers in the chamber."

"Nor are there any," replied Giovanni, who had turned pale as the professor spoke; "nor, I think, is there any fragrance except in your worship's imagination. Odors, being a sort of element combined of the sen-

sual and the spiritual, are apt to deceive us in this manner. The recollection of a perfume, the bare idea of it, may easily be mistaken for a present reality."

"Ay; but my sober imagination does not often play such tricks," said Baglioni; "and, were I to fancy any kind of odor, it would be that of some vile apothecary drug, wherewith my fingers are likely enough to be imbued. Our worshipful friend Rappaccini, as I have heard, tinctures his medicaments with odors richer than those of Araby. Doubtless, likewise, the fair and learned Signora Beatrice would minister to her patients with drafts as sweet as a maiden's breath; but wo to him that sips them!"

Giovanni's face evinced many contending emotions. The tone in which the professor alluded to the pure and lovely daughter of Rappaccini was a torture to his soul; and yet the intimation of a view of her character, opposite to his own, gave instantaneous distinctness to a thousand dim suspicions, which now grinned at him like so many demons. But he strove hard to quell them and to respond to Baglioni with a true lover's perfect faith.

"Signor professor," said he, "you were my father's friend; perchance, too, it is your purpose to act a friendly part towards his son. I would fain feel nothing towards you save respect and deference; but I pray you to observe, signor, that there is one subject on which we must not speak. You know not the Signora Beatrice. You can not, therefore, estimate the wrong—the blasphemy, I may even say—that is offered to her character by a light or injurious word."

"Giovanni! my poor Giovanni!" answered the professor, with a calm expression of pity, "I know this wretched girl far better than yourself. You shall hear the truth in respect to the poisonous Rappaccini and his poisonous daughter; yes, poisonous as she is beautiful. Listen; for, even should you do violence to my gray hairs, it shall not silence me. That old fable of the Indiain woman has become a truth by the deep and deadly science of Rappaccini and in the person of the lovely Beatrice."

Giovanni groaned and hid his face.

"Her father," continued Baglioni, "was not restrained by natural affection from offering up his child in this horrible manner as the victim of his insane zeal for science; for, let us do him justice, he is as true a man of science as ever distilled his own heart in an alembic. What, then, will be your fate? Beyond a doubt you are selected as the material of some new experiment. Perhaps the result is to be death; perhaps a fate more awful still. Rappaccini, with what he calls the interest of science before his eyes, will hesitate at nothing."

"It is a dream," muttered Giovanni to himself; "surely it is a dream."

"But," resumed the professor, "be of good cheer, son of my friend. It is not yet too late for the rescue. Possibly we may even succeed in bringing back this miserable child within the limits of ordinary nature, from which her father's madness has estranged her. Behold this little silver vase! It was wrought by the hands of the renowned Benvenuto Cellini, and is well worthy to be a love gift to the fairest dame in Italy. But its contents are invaluable. One little sip of this antidote would have rendered the most virulent poisons of Borgias innocuous. Doubt not that it will be as efficacious against those of Rappaccini. Bestow the vase, and the precious liquid within it, on your Beatrice, and hopefully await the result."

Baglioni laid a small, exquisitely wrought silver vial on the table and withdrew, leaving what he had said to produce its effect upon the young man's mind.

"We will thwart Rappaccini yet," thought he, chuckling to himself, as he

descended the stairs; "but, let us confess the truth of him, he is a wonderful man—a wonderful man indeed; a vile empiric, however, in his practise, and therefore not to be tolerated by those who respect the good old rules of the medical profession."

Throughout Giovanni's whole acquaintance with Beatrice, he had occasionally, as we have said, been haunted by dark surmises as to her character; yet so thoroughly had she made herself felt by him as a simple, natural, most affectionate, and guileless creature, that the image now held by Professor Baglioni looked as strange and incredible as if it were not in accordance with his own original conception. True, there were ugly recollections connected with his first glimpses of the beautiful girl; he could not quite forget the bouquet that withered in her grasp, and the insect that perished amid the sunny air, by no ostensible agency save the fragrance of her breath. These incidents, however, dissolving in the pure light of her character, had no longer the efficacy of facts, but were acknowledged as mistaken fantasies, by whatever testimony of the senses they might appear to be substantiated. There is something truer and more real than what we can see with the eyes and touch with the finger. On such better evidence had Giovanni founded his confidence in Beatrice, though rather by the necessary force of her high attributes than by any deep and generous faith on his part. But now his spirit was incapable of sustaining itself at the height to which the early enthusiasm of passion had exalted it; he fell down, groveling among earthly doubts, and defiled therewith the pure whiteness of Beatrice's image. Not that he gave her up; he did but distrust. He resolved to institute some decisive test that should satisfy him, once for all, whether there were those dreadful peculiarities in her physical nature which could not be supposed to exist without some corresponding monstrosity of soul. His eyes, gazing down afar, might have deceived him as to the lizard, the insect, and the flowers; but if he could witness, at the distance of a few paces, the sudden blight of one fresh and healthful flower in Beatrice's hand, there would be room for no further question. With this idea he hastened to the florist's and purchased a bouquet that was still gemmed with the morning dewdrops.

It was now the customary hour of his daily interview with Beatrice. Before descending into the garden, Giovanni failed not to look at his figure in the mirror—a vanity to be expected in a beautiful young man, yet, as displaying itself at that troubled and feverish moment, the token of a certain shallowness of feeling and insincerity of character. He did gaze, however, and said to himself that his features had never before possessed so rich a grace, nor his eyes such a vivacity, nor his cheeks so warm a hue of superabundant life.

"At least," thought he, "her poison has not yet insinuated itself into my system. I am no flower to perish in her grasp."

With that thought he turned his eyes on the bouquet, which he had never once laid aside from his hand. A thrill of indefinable horror shot through his frame on perceiving that those dewy flowers were already beginning to droop; they wore the aspect of things that had been fresh and lovely yesterday. Giovanni grew white as marble, and stood motionless before the mirror, staring at his own reflection there as at the likeness of something frightful. He remembered Baglioni's remark about the fragrance that seemed to pervade the chamber. It must have been the poison in his breath! Then he shuddered—shuddered at himself. Recovering from his stupor, he began to watch with curious eyes a spider that was busily at work hanging its web from the an-

tique cornice of the apartment, crossing and recrossing the artful system of interwoven lines—as vigorous and active a spider as ever dangled from an old ceiling. Giovanni bent toward the insect, and emitted a deep, long breath. The spider suddenly ceased its toil; the web vibrated with a tremor originating in the body of the small artizan. Again Giovanni sent forth a breath, deeper, longer, and imbued with a venomous feeling out of his heart: he knew not whether he were wicked, or only desperate. The spider made a convulsive gripe with his limbs and hung dead across the window.

"Accursed! accursed!" muttered Giovanni, addressing himself. "Hast thou grown so poisonous that this deadly insect perishes by thy breath?"

At that moment a rich, sweet voice came floating up from the garden.

"Giovanni! Giovanni! It is past the hour! Why tarriest thou? Come down!"

"Yes," muttered Giovanni again. "She is the only being whom my breath may not slay! Would that it might!"

He rushed down, and in an instant was standing before the bright and loving eyes of Beatrice. A moment ago his wrath and despair had been so fierce that he could have desired nothing so much as to wither her by a glance; but with her actual presence there came influences which had too real an existence to be at once shaken off; recollections of the delicate and benign power of her feminine nature, which had so often enveloped him in a religious calm; recollections of many a holy and passionate outgush of her heart, when the pure fountain had been unsealed from its depths and made visible in its transparency to his mental eye; recollections which, had Giovanni known how to estimate them, would have assured him that all this ugly mystery was but an earthly illusion, and that, whatever mist of evil might seem to have gathered over her, the real Beatrice was a heavenly angel. Incapable as he was of such high faith, still her presence had not utterly lost its magic. Giovanni's rage was quelled into an aspect of sullen insensibility. Beatrice, with a quick spiritual sense, immediately felt that there was a gulf of blackness between them which neither he nor she could pass. They walked on together, sad and silent, and came thus to the marble fountain and to its pool of water on the ground, in the midst of which grew the shrub that bore gemlike blossoms. Giovanni was affrighted at the eager enjoyment—the appetite, as it were—with which he found himself inhaling the fragrance of the flowers.

"Beatrice," asked he, abruptly, "whence came this shrub?"

"My father created it," answered she, with simplicity.

"Created it! created it!" repeated Giovanni. "What mean you, Beatrice?"

"He is a man fearfully acquainted with the secrets of Nature," replied Beatrice; "and, at the hour when I first drew breath, this plant sprang from the soil, the offspring of his science, of his intellect, while I was but his earthly child. Approach it not!" continued she, observing with terror that Giovanni was drawing nearer to the shrub. "It has qualities that you little dream of. But I, dearest Giovanni—I grew up and blossomed with the plant and was nourished with its breath. It was my sister, and I loved it with a human affection; for, alas!—hast thou not suspected it?—there was an awful doom."

Here Giovanni frowned so darkly upon her that Beatrice paused and trembled. But her faith in his tenderness reassured her, and made her blush that she had doubted for an instant.

"There was an awful doom," she continued, "the effect of my father's

fatal love of science, which estranged me from all society of my kind. Until Heaven sent thee, dearest Giovanni, O, how lonely was thy poor Beatrice!"

"Was it a hard doom?" asked Giovanni, fixing his eyes upon her.

"Only of late have I known how hard it was," answered she, tenderly. "O, yes; but my heart was torpid, and therefore quiet."

Giovanni's rage broke forth from his sullen gloom like a lightning flash out of a dark cloud.

"Accursed one!" cried he, with venomous scorn and anger. "And, finding thy solitude wearisome, thou hast severed me likewise from all the warmth of life and enticed me into thy region of unspeakable horror!"

"Giovanni!" exclaimed Beatrice, turning her large bright eyes upon his face. The force of his words had not found its way into her mind; she was merely thunderstruck.

"Yes, poisonous thing!" repeated Giovanni, beside himself with passion. "Thou has done it! Thou hast blasted me! Thou hast filled my veins with poison! Thou hast made me as hateful, as ugly, as loathsome and deadly a creature as thyself—a world's wonder of hideous monstrosity! Now, if our breath be happily as fatal to ourselves as to all others, let us join our lips in one kiss of unutterable hatred, and so die!"

"What has befallen me?" murmured Beatrice, with a low moan out of her heart. "Holy Virgin, pity me, a poor heart-broken child!"

"Thou,—dost thou pray?" cried Giovanni, still with the most fiendish scorn. "Thy very prayers, as they come from thy lips, taint the atmosphere with death. Yes, yes; let us pray! Let us to church and dip our fingers in the holy water at the portal! They that come after us will perish as by a pestilence! Let us sign crosses in the air! It will be scattering curses abroad in the likeness of holy symbols!"

"Giovanni," said Beatrice, calmly, for her grief was beyond passion, "why dost thou join thyself with me thus in those terrible words? I, it is true, am the horrible thing thou namest me. But thou,—what hast thou to do, save with one other shudder at my hideous misery to go forth out of the garden and mingle with thy race, and forget that there ever crawled on earth such a monster as poor Beatrice?"

"Dost thou pretend ignorance?" asked Giovanni, scowling upon her. "Behold! this power have I gained from the pure daughter of Rappaccini."

There was a swarm of summer insects flitting through the air in search of the food promised by the flower odors of the fatal garden. They circled round Giovanni's head, and were evidently attracted towards him by the same influence which had drawn them for an instant within the sphere of several of the shrubs. He sent forth a breath among them, and smiled bitterly at Beatrice as at least a score of the insects fell dead upon the ground.

"I see it! I see it!" shrieked Beatrice. "It is my father's fatal science! No, no, Giovanni; it was not I! Never! never! I dreamed only to love thee and be with thee a little time, and so to let thee pass away, leaving but thine image in mine heart; for, Giovanni, believe it, though my body be nourished with poison, my spirit is God's creature, and craves love as its daily food. But my father, —he has united us in this fearful sympathy. Yes; spurn me, tread upon me, kill me! O, what is death after such words as thine? But it was not I. Not for a world of bliss would I have done it."

GIOVANNI'S passion had exhausted itself in its outburst from his sense, mournful, and not without tenderness, of the intimate and peculiar relationship between Beatrice and

himself. They stood, as it were, in an utter solitude, which would be made none the less solitary by the densest throng of human life. Ought not, then, the desert of humanity around them to press this insulated pair closer together? If they should be cruel to one another, who was there to be kind to them? Besides, thought Giovanni, might there not still be a hope of his returning within the limits of ordinary nature, and leading Beatrice, the redeemed Beatrice, by the hand? O, weak, and selfish, and unworthy spirit, that could dream of an earthly union and earthly happiness as possible, after such deep love had been so bitterly wronged as was Beatrice's love by Giovanni's blighting words! No, no; there could be no such hope. She must pass heavily, with that broken heart, across the borders of Time —she must bathe her hurts in some fount of paradise, and forget her grief in the light of immortality, and *there* be well.

But Giovanni did not know it.

"Dear Beatrice," said he, approaching her, while she shrank away as always at his approach, but now with a different impulse, "dearest Beatrice, our fate is not yet so desperate. Behold! there is a medicine, potent, as a wise physician has assured me, and almost divine in its efficacy. It is composed of ingredients the most opposite to those by which thy awful father has brought this calamity upon thee and me. It is distilled of blessed herbs. Shall we not quaff it together, and thus be purified from evil?"

"Give it me!" said Beatrice, extending her hand to receive the little silver vial which Giovanni took from his bosom. She added, with a peculiar emphasis, "I will drink; but do thou wait the result."

She put Baglioni's antidote to her lips; and, at the same moment, the figure of Rappaccini emerged from the portals and came slowly toward the marble fountain. As he drew near, the pale man of science seemed to gaze with a triumphant expression at the beautiful youth and maiden, as might an artist who should spend his life in achieving a picture or a group of statuary and finally be satisfied with his success. He paused; his bent form grew erect with conscious power; he spread out his hands over them in the attitude of a father imploring a blessing upon his children; but those were the same hands that had thrown poison into the stream of their lives. Giovanni trembled. Beatrice shuddered nervously, and pressed her hand upon her heart.

"My daughter," said Rappaccini, "thou art no longer lonely in the world. Pluck one of those precious gems from thy sister shrub and bid thy bridegroom wear it in his bosom. It will not harm him now. My science and the sympathy between thee and him have so wrought within his system that he now stands apart from common men, as thou dost, daughter of my pride and triumph, from ordinary women. Pass on, then, through the world, most dear to one another and dreadful to all besides!"

"My father," said Beatrice, feebly —and still as she spoke she kept her hand upon her heart—"wherefore didst thou inflict this miserable doom upon thy child?"

"Miserable!" exclaimed Rappaccini. "What mean you, foolish girl? Dost thou deem it misery to be endowed with marvelous gifts against which no power nor strength could avail an enemy—misery, to be able to quell the mightiest with a breath—misery, to be as terrible as thou art beautiful? Wouldst thou, then, have preferred the condition of a weak woman, exposed to all evil and capable of none?"

"I would fain have been loved, not feared," murmured Beatrice, sinking down upon the ground. "But now it matters not. I am going, father, where the evil which thou hast striven to mingle with my being will pass

away like a dream—like the fragrance of these poisonous flowers, which will no longer taint my breath among the flowers of Eden. Farewell, Giovanni! Thy words of hatred are like lead within my heart; but they, too, will fall away as I ascend. O, was there not, from the first, more poison in thy nature than in mine?"

To Beatrice—so radically had her earthly part been wrought upon by Rappaccini's skill — as poison had been life, so the powerful antidote was death; and thus the poor victim of man's ingenuity and of thwarted nature, and of the fatality that attends all such efforts of perverted wisdom, perished there, at the feet of her father and Giovanni. Just at that moment Professor Pietro Baglioni looked forth from the window, and called loudly, in a tone of triumph mixed with horror, to the thunderstricken man of science,—

"Rappaccini! Rappaccini! and is *this* the upshot of your experiment?"

CLAIR DE LUNE

By MINNIE FAEGRE KNOX

O never ye sleep in the moonlight,
  My pious old Granny would say,
For sleepers, bewitched by the moonlight,
  With madness thereafter are fay.

But why should I sleep when the moon shines,
  And waste all her beauty away?
There's more to be done when the moon shines
  Than slumber in houses and pray.

My body I'll bathe in the moon-rays,
  My mantle of dew shall be spun.
Encrowned in a nimbus of moon-rays,
  I'll dance till the night flee the sun.

And if I should yield to the moonbeams,
  Laid low by weird malisons' harm,
Let me sleep 'neath the turf in the moonbeams,
  Enthralled by the night's silver charm.

Disappearing Bullets

By GEORGE J. BRENN

EXPERIENCE SMITH, master detective, looked pointedly at the man seated opposite him.

"Let's get down to business," he suggested. "When did this trouble of yours start?"

"About two weeks ago," said Bradley.

"Someone telephoned my home at Westbury about midnight. Told me that I would be shot while I was breakfasting. I hung up the receiver and returned to bed. Thought it was just a crank or practical joker. Next morning a bullet pierced the window of my breakfast room, on a level with my head!"

"What!"

"That's not all," continued Bradley nervously. "It never touched me, and we couldn't find a trace of it, other than the hole in the glass. The whole room has been examined minutely, but we are unable to find that a bullet has lodged in the walls or furniture. The hole in the window pane is about the size that a .38 caliber bullet would make."

"What did you do?" asked Smith.

"I was about to look out the window for the person who did the shooting, but Bernice, my daughter, restrained me. She persuaded me to go to another window to look out, assuming that it would be less dangerous. There wasn't a person in sight, however."

"Strange," commented Barnes.

"Fairly strange," drawled Smith. "What else, sir?"

"The same thing has happened half a dozen times since. First there would be a threatening telephone call, advising me of the hour at which the shot would be fired. The strange voice would say: 'The bullet will not touch you *this* time.' The manner in which it was said would lead one to believe that on some subsequent occasion the bullet *would* touch me."

"Always the same voice?" asked Experience Smith.

"Yes. I have no doubt of that, but I can't seem to place the owner. There is a slight imperfection or impediment in his speech, but I don't know how to describe it. It's not a lisp or a stammer, nor is it due to inability to pronounce certain consonants. The only way I can describe it is to say that it is a 'thick,' imperfect or slurred pronunciation of almost every word, although what is said is always intelligible enough."

"And has this feller made good his threats every time?" questioned Smith.

Bradley nodded emphatically.

"He surely has! There are two other holes in windows at Westbury. There is one in a library window in my home in Park Avenue. Another is in the plate glass window of my office in the Corinthian Building. Do you wonder that the thing is driving me mad?"

"No need of bein' alarmed, yit," encouraged Experience Smith. "Any demands been made for money, or anything like that?"

"None," answered Bradley.

"Any idea of the reason for the attacks?"

"None," repeated Bradley.

The telephone on Barnes' desk rang, and the telephone official answered it.

"Yes, Mr. Bradley is here," Barnes announced. "No. He won't talk over the telephone to anyone." Barnes listened for another minute and hung up the receiver.

"Was that right?" he asked, turning to Bradley. "I understood you to say that you've given up answering your telephone."

"I've *tried* to," said the financier, wearily, "but it's almost impossible to transact business without it. That call may have been from my office, or it may have been from that —man."

"It was, Mr. Bradley," said Barnes. "I don't wish to alarm you unnecessarily, but your Unknown says he is going to launch another harmless bullet in your direction."

"I thought so!" muttered Bradley.

Smith sauntered to the window nearest Bradley and looked out. They were fifteen stories above the street. He could look out on half a dozen skyscrapers. Far below was the seething bustle of down-town New York.

"Come away from there, Experience!" cautioned Barnes.

As he spoke there came a sharp impact against the window pane,——

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The Eyrie

(Continued from page 580)

effective atmosphere of mystery. *The Eighth Green Man* is a top-notch work of fiction, and *Ebony Magic* is another."

Ralph Carson, of St. Paul, writes to The Eyrie: "I have been a steady reader of WEIRD TALES for some time and find it growing better with each issue. I have just finished the March number and can hardly wait for the next one. Each new serial seems to be better than the last one. Each installment seems to add many exciting possibilities for the next. Your writers are surely doing their bit to improve the magazine, and I have no end of praise for them. In my estimation the best story in the March issue is *The Strange People,* by Murray Leinster, with *The Giant World,* by Ray Cummings, running a close second. Ray Cummings and H. P. Lovecraft are my favorite writers, although frequently some of your newer writers come out with a story that equals their skill."

"Please do put in some more of the Jules de Grandin stories by Seabury Quinn," writes Mrs. Paul Clay, of Nashville, Tennessee. "They are my favorites. Then I liked immensely the exploits of Dr. Brodsky, the Surgeon of Souls, in Victor Rousseau's series that ended last summer—the one who gave his soul to a boy, thereby killing his own physical self in some kind of machine. I like your reprints also."

Writes Cod Young, of Constantine, Michigan: "I prefer Price and Lovecraft to all your other writers. I have followed your magazine since the days of *The Rats in the Walls,* and even before. Price's devil stories are subtly grand."

"By all means, continue your reprints," writes Mrs. Leslie Scott, of Columbus, Ohio. "The younger generation are too prone to neglect reading some of the really great stories because they are not a product of the 'jazz age.' I am especially partial to the weird-scientific tales, and pronounce *The Giant World* perfect. *The Strange People* in the current issue bids fair to be a very unusual story. *The Dark Chrysalis* was a masterpiece also."

R. E. Howard writes from Texas: "Mr. Lovecraft's latest story, *The Call of Cthulhu,* is indeed a masterpiece, which I am sure will live as one of the highest achievements of literature. Mr. Lovecraft holds a unique position in the literary world; he has grasped, to all intents, the worlds outside our paltry ken. His scope is unlimited and his range is cosmic. He has the rare gift of making the unreal seem very real and terrible, without lessening the sensation of horror attendant thereto. He touches peaks in his tales which no modern or ancient writer has ever hinted. Sentences and phrases leap suddenly at the reader, as if in utter blackness of solar darkness a door were suddenly flung open, whence flamed the red fire of Purgatory and through which might be momentarily glimpsed monstrous and nightmarish shapes. Herbert Spencer may have been right when he said that it was beyond the

human mind to grasp the Unknowable, but Mr. Lovecraft is in a fair way of disproving that theory, I think. I await his next story with eager anticipation, knowing that whatever the subject may be, it will be handled with the skill and incredible vision which he has always shown."

Writes E. M. Gunnell, of Galesburg, Illinois: "*The Call of Cthulhu* is one of the finest, most finished pieces of the kind I have ever come across. Give us more of these gems."

"As for *The Call of Cthulhu*," writes Edwin Beard, of St. Louis, "it was the apex of sheer weirdness. Gosh, it was immense!"

"I got my copy of *The Moon Terror* yesterday—the book which you have reprinted from early issues of WEIRD TALES, and I was so gripped by the fascinating narrative of that mysterious KWO that I could not lay the book down until I had finished it," writes George C. Engels, of Chicago. "Please, Mr. Editor, please print some more of those fascinating serials in book form, as *The Moon Terror* was worth many times what it cost. It is a bear of a story—and I don't mean perhaps!"

Writes Elmer Klopp, of Chicago: "I wish you would print more weird tales like *The Golden Whistle* by Eli Colter. It was a weird love tale, the best I have read for some time. I save all my WEIRD TALES books and read them over and over. I never get tired of them, and I believe there is no other magazine that thrills and gives such a big kick as WEIRD TALES."

Readers, your favorite story in the March issue, as shown by your votes, is the opening installment of Murray Leinster's serial, *The Strange People*. Your second and third choices were the concluding installment of *The Giant World*, by Ray Cummings, and G. G. Pendarves' strange devil-tale, *The Eighth Green Man*. What is your favorite in this issue?

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The Bat-Men of Thorium

(Continued from page 598)

whisked away into space; trees bent their frail backs to the blast; and there swooped down upon us a very tornado of wind.

While we were struggling to obtain shelter from the blast, Griggs had been at the door of the house. He came back to us in great excitement. He had apparently noted something that was of importance.

Bursting upon us he said: "That's the answer to our question—that's it—that there gale."

"I'm afraid you will have to be more explicit," said the professor.

We had learned that Griggs had a head that should be reckoned with in any affair of this knd, and therefore we listened carefully to him.

"Why, don't you see, gentlemen, there's the way out for us? That wind is as different from the air down here with its hot dryness as cheese is from chalk. Besides, who ever heard of gales of wind inside the earth? It isn't reasonable. No sir—that wind with its fresh salt tang has just come from the earth above us, and the way it got here is the way we can get back. Don't you see it now, sir?" he addressed me eagerly.

"Of course I do. And I can't help but feel that you are right, too," I said heartily.

"It seems incredible that we have not thought of it before. If there is air here, it must have come down from the atmosphere around the earth. It could not exist here inside the globe. Your words give us added hope, Griggs," said the professor, pointing his chin into the teeth of the breeze, evidently trying to guess where it came from.

Soon the wind died down, and as the air became still once more, we began to realize how tired our muscles had become. We lay down on the soft couches and slept.

I was awakened by Griggs some time later. The same green luminosity covered everything, so that there was no possibility of reasoning how long we had slept. It might have been days, or it might have been only a few hours. My watch was a poor guide under the circumstances, and anyway Eastern standard time meant less than nothing down here.

Griggs was excitedly running to and fro, apparently searching for something. I came up with him outside the house and asked him what was wrong. He stopped for a minute to answer my question.

"The professor," he said pantingly. "He's gone, and I don't know when he went away, or where he went."

It was true, the professor was nowhere to be seen. I looked quickly around. There was apparently only one path that he could have taken, and that led up the hill, and under the white foliage of the forest. I did not doubt that he had pursued this path in search of some rare specimen, or perhaps in chase of some butterfly that had flitted by him. I conferred with Griggs, and we decided that to one of the professor's impractical nature such a journey might be filled with danger, and therefore we ought to follow and try to overtake him as soon as possible. We therefore started at a smart pace up the hill, and under the trees. The overhanging foliage made the place very dark, and we continually struck ourselves against projecting limbs and rocks, but we did not stop to bewail our misfortunes. We were too intent on finding the professor.

On all sides grew abundant fruit, of the same variety as that which

we had been given to eat by the servants in Diegon's palace. The wind had died away, or perhaps was not so noticeable because we were sheltered by the trees. We continued our course for some minutes, without seeing any trace of the professor, when I thought I heard a rustling sound ahead of us, which might have been made by the professor in his ardent search for the butterfly. We stopped a moment to listen, and our suspicion was confirmed. That it was the sound produced by the professor in his excited chase of some rare species, I doubted not. We now increased our speed and were soon rewarded by a sight of the professor. A few more steps brought us up with him. He was so intent upon his search that he did not notice our advent, until I took his arm.

Wiping the perspiration from his brow, he stopped with a smile.

"I saw you fellows were busy sleeping, and so I started out alone to explore this place. I have been keenly interested, so that I did not

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notice the passage of time. I suppose I must have alarmed you. I am indeed sorry."

I told the professor that we were glad we had found him. There was nothing to be sorry about. I suggested that while we were out here, we might as well explore the place a little further, and the others acquiescing, we started forward along the trail, which appeared to be more or less well worn.

The professor fell into a fit of abstraction and for a while did not answer my queries. Whether he was thinking of something he had seen, or of something pertinent to our escape, I could not tell. After a while, he spoke.

"You know, Griggs said more than he thought when he spoke about that gale of wind being the way out for us. If we could only find the place whence it came, we might be able to devise a means of escape from this hole."

"Apparently it has died away, and we may have to await a return of the gale before we can do that," I suggested.

"I don't think it has died away. I felt it strongly, when I wandered away from the shelter of these trees; besides, do you not hear that singing sound?"

I listened and did indeed hear a singing sound that might have been the scream of the wind above us. As we advanced, the sound seemed to grow in intensity. The noise began to reach appalling dimensions and struck terror into us, but still we proceeded, intent upon finding the origin of this rush of air.

The trees began to thin somewhat now, and the ground grew more rocky, so that we were much put to it to maintain our pace. Only the hope of deliverance kept us going. Through the gradually thinning trees on our left hand we could see the placid waters of the lake which surrounded Thorium. We were evidently pursuing a course around the island.

After another half-hour of this walking, during which the wind blew more and more strongly in our faces, we emerged entirely from the trees, and braced ourselves against the chill blast, which struck us with renewed fury. Our path now lay steeply uphill, and we seized every opportunity to shelter ourselves behind rocks wherever they offered protection.

We were rapidly approaching the origin of the blast. It seemed to emerge from a huge black hole in the rock, for we could see the vegetation around the mouth of the hole or cave, whatever it was, bending to the rushing air.

"I believe we are at the limits of Thorium," said the professor thoughtfully, but with a degree of restrained excitement.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

He did not reply for a moment, but seemed to be bent upon establishing some fact before he replied. At length he lowered his eyes, for he had been peering upward.

"Yes—it is so. Another twenty feet will carry us to the roof, or whatever you care to call it, of this cavern, for it is really that."

Griggs had been searching the sky, as I must still call it, and now spoke.

"Yes. That's right, Professor. I can see all sorts of rocks and crags stickin' out of that roof above us. By Hokey! I've got it! That big black hole up there with the wind rushing out of it is the hole we must get through to return to the world." He turned to the professor anxiously for verification.

"Undoubtedly that is correct. We must be approaching the base of a lava tube. Probably this land of Thorium is situated within the enormous cavity of what has at one time been the reservoir that fed some gigantic volcano. Our only hope of reaching the surface again is to pur-

sue that tube over many miles, climbing upward, always upward, until we reach the blue sky once more."

"How many miles would you say we would have to go, Professor?" asked Griggs.

"That is indeed speculative. It might be ten, or a thousand. Some of these tubes are twisted and twined and catacombed in an almost unbelievable manner. We should have to chance the distance if we decided to try our luck at escape."

All this time, we had been approaching the black hole. Now it yawned dark and ugly ahead of us. The howling of the gale that swept upon us from what we now felt quite sure was the earth above us, almost deafened us, but above it I thought I detected some different noise, resembling indeed faintly the whirring of machinery. The others had heard it also, and we stood still, looking at each other in complete astonishment.

"That must be the Old Man's coffee grinder. I knowed as 'ow we'd 'ave to meet 'im before we got much further," said Griggs mournfully.

"Nonsense! I'm going to see what it all means," I said, taking a step toward the yawning mouth of the tube.

The wind almost swept me off my feet, and, indeed, I did crawl upon my hands and knees, which I found enabled me to make better progress. I noticed that the trail led slightly to one side of the entrance, and accordingly I followed it. I soon understood the reason for this. The blast emerged in an almost perfect pencil of air from the mouth, and to the side there was an almost complete calm at the entrance of the tube.

The path wound still farther away from the hole itself, and I crept warily forward, my two companions crawling slowly behind me; for we

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did not dare assume the perpendicular position for fear that we might be caught once more by the full force of the gale. It was not long before we found our progress arrested by a solid wall of rock. Dismayed, we stood staring about.

"This is indeed a strange conclusion to so startling a journey," began the professor, and stopped. He placed his ear to the wall of rock, once, then twice, and each time I watched the expression on his face.

"I believe I understand it now," he cried. "At least we may as well try it out."

Without waiting to explain his meaning, he began to lead us. We skirted the wall of rock with great care, and found what the professor seemed to have expected—a turning-point. One or two minutes more of walking, and we stopped. The noise that burst upon us now was deafening, but very different from that of the rushing wind.

The professor had found an opening in the wall, and was cautiously getting through. Griggs followed, and I came last. After we had all squeezed through, we looked in dumb amazement at the sight before us. We were in a gigantic power-house. Before us were huge engines, which were undoubtedly pumps for sucking the air from the world without. We could not determine the source of the noise, for there seemed to be no steam; in fact, at first we could not understand the motive power for the pumps. The professor supplied the answer.

"By George! These people are a step ahead of us in this also. Those are radium pumps, I would bet a dollar. Do you not see the great quantities of that luminous rock lying in those bins? That is evidently the pitchblende from which the power to operate these pumps is obtained. Marvelous—quite marvelous!"

"The marvel to me is that the machinery appears to operate itself. There is not a single living thing within this vast power-house," I said, at the same time carefully scanning the entire floor to confirm the statement. Peer and search as I would, however, I could not see any living being whatever.

While we had been standing there, the professor had wandered around the gallery upon which we stood. It was an area of only a few square yards, and there seemed to be no means of descending to the floor upon which the pumps were located. I looked across the great hall, and saw a pair of heavy doors set in the opposite wall. They appeared to be of very solid construction, and when closed would require a small army to force them open. This evidently was the main entrance, while that by which we had come upon the hall was merely some small observation platform, or perhaps even only a ventilation hole for the hall, though I could see little use for the latter if there were no men to operate the huge motors.

I could not help but marvel at the wonders which were becoming almost daily experiences for us. What would the scientific world say, I thought, about a great pumping, system operated in the interior of the earth, sucking pure air from the surface? How would they receive the news of these enormous motors, the smallest of which could not have been less than a hundred feet in height, and powered by the disintegration of the atom? Even the most gullible of them might excusably scoff at such a story. And yet, here we stood actually within the hall where these great engines rolled with infallible precision.

The professor began to move once more to the hole by which we had entered. The air was too much confined for him, he said, and certainly this was true, but I lingered, my mind always of a mechanical bent,

dwelling upon every detail of the installation. I toyed with the possibilities of such an application of atomic energy in the power-houses of the surface. My eyes scanned every detail that might be used in the future for the duplication of such a plant. After a few minutes of this contemplation, I turned away with a smile. It would take not less than six months to familiarize myself with the details of the system. I was not even familiar as yet with the method of driving the enormous motors. If I wanted to learn anything, I would most certainly have to inspect the machinery at closer range. I determined to consult with Diegon before doing anything more. Probably he could supply me with details that would the more readily enable me to understand the fundamental principles upon which the plant was operated.

The professor had already left the hall, and Griggs and I turned to go. This time I went first through the small hole, which was only large enough to pass one at a time. I was about half through when I heard a faint cry. Pausing for a moment to listen more carefully, I heard it repeated. I recognized the professor's voice, but it was wrung in accents of agony. I stopped for nothing more, but regardless of projections and sharp stones, I wormed my way through the hole at a great speed, and soon emerged on the other side. Standing up, I looked anxiously around. But though I searched every section of the landscape with my eyes, I could see no traces of my dear friend. I listened intently for a repetition of the cry that might give me some clue to his whereabouts, but none came. Except for the whirring of the pumping machinery, a deep silence brooded over all. The professor had disappeared!

The terrific combats between the bat-men and the Zoags, and the thrilling adventures of the friends amid frightful dangers, will be described in next month's issue of WEIRD TALES.

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The Hand of the Invisible

(Continued from page 616)

actly as Capron had described her to me. Any word of mine could not do her justice. A sweet smile brightened the piquant little face that peeped forth from her mass of dark tresses.

The girl—for she seemed as natural and real as Capron or I—slowly stretched out her arms to the Rough Rider. As she did so I noticed a gold signet ring encircling the third finger of her left hand.

With a loud, choking cry, Allyn Capron strode past me toward the lovely vision. His arms were outstretched.

"Mercedes! Mercedes, my darling!" he cried hoarsely. "You have appeared again to me at last!"

For a moment he stood between the girl and me. Then I saw him throw his arms out wide and fall forward upon his face. He was lying upon the floor alone. The spirit, or whatever she was, had vanished as quickly and mysteriously as she had appeared.

I left my chair, feeling strangely shaken and dizzy, bent over the fallen man, and turned him over on his back. I had seen death too often not to know that the soul of the Rough Rider had fled.

The country doctor, summoned by me a few hours later from the village of Blue Mountain Lake, pronounced the case one of heart disease, so that I was spared any legal complications.

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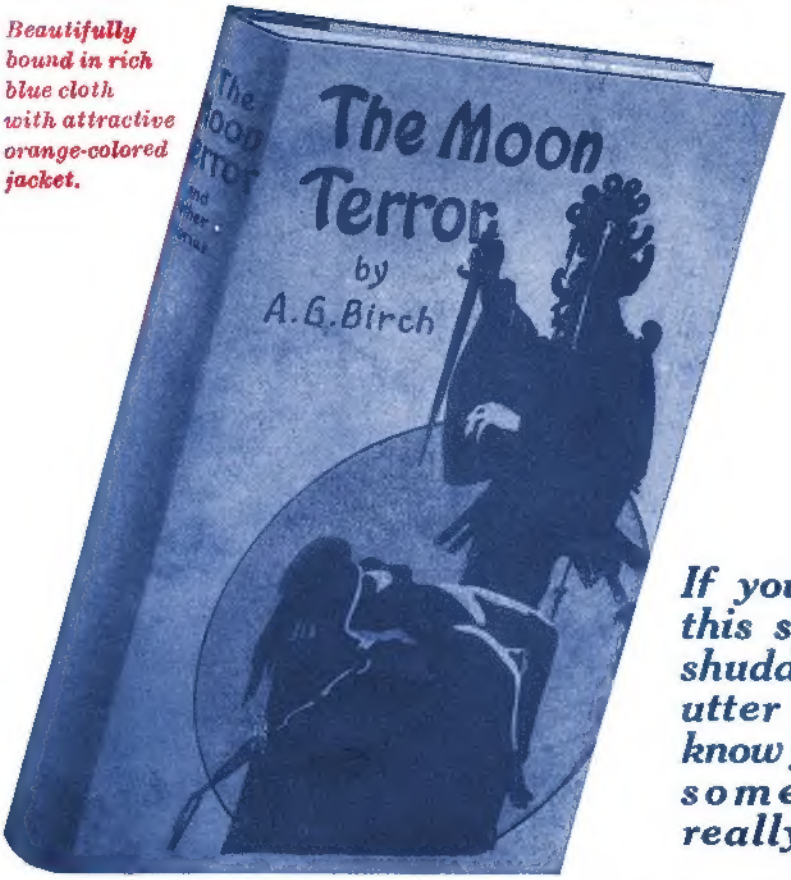

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